

ALFRED

AUGUST 35¢

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HITCHCOCK'S

MYSTERY MAGAZINE



NEW stories
presented by
the master
of **SUSPENSE**



Dear Readers,

The cover this month proudly presents the New Silhouette. Already, the press is saying that it will be the rage this season among men who really care. Please note, if you will, the rippling muscles in the right trouser leg and the adjacent coat sleeve. The casual, back-on-the-heels stance. The figurine delicacy of outline. After trying the Pihdown Man, The Thin Man and others, evolution has finally decided on the Hitchcock Man. There will be no further progress on the male form, definitely none. This is it. And please bear in mind that there will be no exchanges or refunds.

Now to those of you who have suggested that I trade my two Scalyhams for one Bloodhound—because Bloodhounds track down criminals, and would therefore be a more appropriate breed of dog for me—I refer you to the facial expression on this month's cover. My answer, quite obviously, is in the negative. My dogs, incidentally, are named Jeffrey and Stanley. I have always thought these suitable names for dogs. If I had a son, I know, quite definitely, what I would have called him. Nothing like Jeffrey or Stanley. I would have dubbed him Rover or Fido.

Please read on now, and may you have a shuddering good time with the verbal mayhem which follows.

Alfred Hitchcock

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mystery magazine

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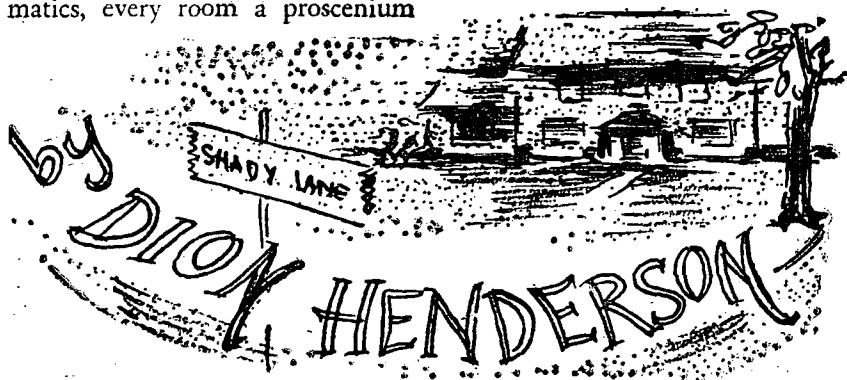
Babysitting has replaced weeding, egg-gathering, and dish-washing as a source of income for teenagers. As a part of the contemporary American scene, it figures largely in the lives of the parents of the sitters as well as the parents of those for whom the sitters sit.

THE HOUSE sighed audibly, and began to settle into deepening quiet. In the Tennessee stone fireplace, the white birch logs glowed cozily, and at one side, the cat slept on the leather top of the drum table, legs and tail distributed casually among the figurines of Suzay's costume doll period. That is one of the last periods about which a father can be entirely carefree, Andrew Davidson thought wryly. It would be nice if he knew it at the time. After the costume dolls came the exotic boy singers, not dangerous perhaps but very noisy, and then the yearning after glamor, not so noisy but very trying, and after that the creative talent, dramatics, every room a proscenium

stage, every parental admonition a cue, and this period was both noisy and trying. After that—Andrew Davidson sank gratefully into his chair. The house was warm and fully quiet except for the murmur of the FM and the soft sound of the presence of the fire and he picked up the book he looked forward to reading.

The telephone rang.

The ringing was excessively shrill; probably his wife had turned up the bell while she was dressing to go out for bridge and had forgotten to turn it down. The cat's tail twitched perilously among the dolls. Andrew Davidson rose hastily, wanting to answer the phone



before it rang again, rousing the house, and in his haste tipped over the ashtray to make a mess on the rug. The telephone rang again, shatteringly, before he could reach it. When he did, he spoke with unreasonable gruffness.

"Well, my goodness, Father," Suzay's voice said in his ear. "You sound so *cross*." She was babysitting for friends.

"Sorry," Andrew Davidson said, at least as gruffly as before. "I just tipped over the ash tray. Answering the phone."

"You poor dear," Suzay said brightly, "I'm *so* sorry but would you be a *lamb* and see whether I left my math book on the counter? There's just a *murderous* quiz coming up and I'm simply *stalled* without it."

"Just a minute," Andrew Davidson sighed, part of his mind occupied with speculation that a junior high school girl's ability to talk in italics probably rivaled the five inflections of Mandarin. He started walking to the kitchen, then paused scowling and returned to the telephone.

"You took your math book with you," he told his daughter. "I remember seeing it on the pile of assorted supplies you need to tide you over on a three-hour safari."

Suzay said brightly, "Father, are you *sure*?"

"I'm positive," Andrew Davidson said. "You just haven't worked your way far enough down in the pile yet. It probably," he said acidly, "got shuffled in among the movie scripts."

"Well *cha cha*," Suzay said. "Here it is after *all*."

Then she did not say anything. The silence stretched out and Andrew Davidson felt a twinge of uneasiness. There was more to this call than the book query. He said quickly, "Suzay, is everything all right?"

"Why of *course*," Suzay said, still brightly. Then she paused and said, "It's just that I have a silly feeling—"

"Silly feeling about what?"

There was no doubt about his uneasiness now. Andrew Davidson said, "Come on now, what is it?"

"Just noises," Suzay said carelessly. "I keep thinking I hear noises. At the back door. But when I go to see, no one is in sight."

"Well," Andrew Davidson said, and hesitated. More dramatics, of course. Alfred Hitchcock Presents. He said, "Tell me, what television thriller are you watching?"

There was a small pause, then Suzay said distantly, "Please forget that I mentioned it, Father."

"None of that," Andrew Davidson said, the uneasiness coming back despite the saving thought of

melodrama. "If there's really anything out of line, I want to know about it. It wouldn't take me long to get over there."

"I would *much* prefer," Suzay remained frosty, "that you simply forget the whole thing. I'll *try* to cope with my *own* problems."

"All right," Andrew Davidson said. "That's a good Bergman heroine."

But he stood for a few moments, his hand on the phone and his lips pursed. The uneasiness was ridiculous. He knew his daughter. He was sure that he knew his own daughter very well. But still—

It took a few moments to organize his thoughts. First of all, is she at Al and Sally's tonight, or Stephens? No, definitely at Al's. He remembered, on the train Monday Al had asked whether Suzay would be busy Friday night. And he'd told Al to have Sally call Suzay herself. Suzay kept her own appointment book. He'd learned his lesson on that, shortly after Suzay turned thirteen and became a full fledged babysitter. He'd accepted an assignment for her from Mrs. Parsons and when he told her, Suzay looked at him with tragic eyes. Father, how *could* you? They don't have a record-player . . . That dated the recollection, he thought parenthetically. The phase of the long-haired musicians.

But tonight it was definitely Al's house. In fact, he remembered hearing his wife call out when the car came for Suzay. Hi Sally. That was what he remembered. Al and Sally's. Sure. Andrew Davidson reached for the small subdivision directory. He didn't know exactly where they lived. West, he thought. North, too. It couldn't be far. But it wouldn't hurt to see how far. Just in case. He picked up the directory and opened it and then sat there very quietly, feeling the color fade out of his face, feeling the draining away of something inside him, and the return of the first feeling.

It was preposterous, utterly preposterous. He'd been riding the train with Al a couple of years, sitting with the others in the smoker. Chipping in for the Martinis on the last nights before a holiday. Al always brought the olives, anchovy olives, from a delicatessen in his building. Joe Kenneman had the bartender at the Press Club mix the Martinis in a bottle and Al brought the olives and Pete Johnson picked up the cheese from the Exchange. But he didn't know Al's last name. It was utterly preposterous, but he didn't know Al's last name.

Andrew Davidson held the directory very still in his hand, knowing that his face had gone pale and knowing that the feeling in his stomach was not just uneasiness

but the beginning of panic. He put the directory back on the stand and picked up the telephone and dialed a number decisively. Bob Appleby, in the next block. He rode the same train. He'd know. It was just a trick of the mind, anyway. Jarred by something a little out of the ordinary. Too soft, Andrew Davidson thought grimly. Gone flabby with routine crises. When Bob Appleby answered the phone, Andrew Davidson said firmly, "Bob, you know Al What's-his-name, on the train?"

"Al. Nice looking guy but he wears tweed suits."

"That's the one. He brings those olives."

"What's his last name?"

There was a pause. Andrew Davidson said more urgently, "I need to get hold of him and I can't for the life of me think—"

"Isn't that funny?" Bob Appleby said. "I can't either. Wife's name is Sally. She's cute."

"I know," Andrew Davidson said impatiently. "That doesn't help, though. You know any of their friends?"

"Beats me," Bob Appleby said. "Wait a minute. We were at a party where they were once. Somebody said that Jim Connolly's wife was a sorority sister of Sally's." He gurgled at a private amusement. "You could try Jane Connolly."

"Oh, Lord."

"You might have to go over and have a drink before Jane will tell you, but she'll know."

"I know Jane," Andrew Davidson said.

The Connollys were in the subdivision directory. He dialed the number, hoping Jim would answer. But a throaty feminine voice said on a rising inflection, "Hel-lo?"

"Hi, Jane," Andrew Davidson said quickly. "My daughter is babysitting for Al and Sally tonight and I wanted to call her. What's their last name?"

"Oh," the throaty voice said throatily. "Andy. How nice of you. But I don't know exactly where they live now. They were building a new house the last I heard. West, I think. Or North."

She laughed throatily. "Sally's mother-in-law must have loosened up on the purse strings."

"Thanks," Andrew Davidson said. "But if I could just call her."

"That's right, dear. You asked me their name, not their address, and I don't know their address."

"Jane—"

"Of course. It's Smith, that's why you couldn't think of it. Are you sure you wouldn't like to stop over for a drink?"

"No," Andrew Davidson said. "But thanks anyway, Jane. Thanks."

He hung up the telephone and

let his hand rest on it a moment. He was sweating.

All right, he thought. We're all right now. Relax. Al Smith. He opened the subdivision directory. There were several Smiths. Two of them had "A" initials. One was Alfred and one was A.W. He called the Alfred Smith residence and a maid answered the phone. He called A. W. Smith, and the buzzer sounded interminably in his ear. No one answered, the buzzer went on relentlessly, and the panic rose strongly in him again. He held the telephone against his ear with his shoulder and rechecked the listing and saw what he had not seen before, A. W. Smith's home was just through the block from him and A. W. Smith was sixty years old and they had met on the street several times and that definitely was not where Suzay was sitting. The panic subsided and Andrew Davidson smiled wryly. Soft, soft, he thought. You get out of practice for emergencies.

He dialed information and asked for Al Smith's telephone number.

The operator's remote, metallic voice said, "What is the address please?"

"I don't know."

The remote metallic voice shook a little. The operator said, "Are you kidding, mister? There are seven pages of Smiths in the book. . . ."

"Never mind," Andrew Davidson said. "I have a new directory."

That must be it, of course. The subdivision directory was a two-year-old Woman's Club project, and Al and Sally had been building a new house. He opened the metropolitan directory and looked at the seven pages of Smiths. There were two pages of Alberts and Alfreds and A. B. and A. C. and A. D. and A. Albert and A. Bruce and . . .

Andrew Davidson felt his eyes going out of focus. He was sweating again.

The telephone rang, shatteringly loud still, and he jumped and dropped the metropolitan directory on the floor. Then he seized the phone and said, "Hello."

"My goodness, Daddy," Suzay's voice said. "You don't have to shout."

He was immensely relieved. Then, as though hearing an echo he realized that she'd called him Daddy instead of Father and that meant something. She was pretty cool about most things but that meant something. It was more than she could fabricate.

"Suzay," he said, "is everything all right?"

"I'm not sure, Daddy," her voice still was cool but he was positive now that she was frightened. "I think someone tried the back door a little while ago."

"Is it locked? You know what I've always told you."

"Yes, Daddy. Mr. Smith told me the same thing. The doors are all locked and no one can get in. But would you mind terribly, Daddy?"

"Sure," Andrew Davidson said. "I'll come over. Can you tell me how to get there?"

There was another pause. He was beginning to have a conditioned reflex about pauses. His stomach quivered.

"I don't know exactly," Suzay said. "It's not far, though. It only took ten minutes or so. It's a short street and there aren't very many houses. It's a lovely new house."

"But you don't know the address?"

"I'm sorry, Daddy. I didn't pay any attention."

"All right," Andrew Davidson said calmly. "But the telephone number is on the instrument right there in front of you. Just give it to me."

He wrote it down.

"All right, now, Suzay. Don't push the panic button. It may take a little while, but I'll find it."

"Daddy," Suzay's voice was a little thin. "There's a house down the block with lights on. Do you think it would be all right—"

"No," Andrew Davidson said. "Keep the doors locked and stay where you are."

He recovered the metropolitan directory and started over with the Smiths, checking the telephone number against the listings. He went through the two pages of "A" Smiths and it was not there. He shook his head and went back to the start, putting his finger very carefully on each listing, pressing so firmly on the cheap paper that he smeared the ink. The sweat trickled down his forehead into his eyes and stung and he knew suddenly that he was sweating.

He found the telephone number on the third page. Al Smith's name was Elwood. Andrew Davidson kept his finger on the place and the relief flooded over him and he laughed aloud. There was the address: 900 Shady Lane. He wrote it down on the memo pad beneath the telephone number, then exchanged the metropolitan directory for the small one. He took the street map out of the pocket at the back, unfolded it and ran down the index for the cross references. He did it twice. There was no Shady Lane.

Andrew Jackson took out his handkerchief and wiped his hands carefully, then his forehead and face. He lighted a cigarette. Well. Of course. The next subdivision West. Or perhaps North. Ten minutes? It couldn't be more than a couple of miles. There'd be maps

down at the village. Of course. Meanwhile—

He called Information. Another remote metallic voice answered.

"I need to talk to someone who lives in the 900 block on Shady Lane," Andrew Davidson said firmly.

"What is the name, please?"

"It doesn't matter," he said. "Anyone who lives near the Elwood Smith residence at 900 Shady Lane."

The remote metallic voice said, "I can give you the number for the Elwood Smith residence."

"I already have that," Andrew Davidson said. "Thank you. I need someone else in the same block."

"I'm sorry," the voice said remotely, "I cannot give you that information."

"Look," Andrew Davidson said. "You've got a street directory of telephone numbers right there beside you. Just give me the number of anyone who lives in that block. My daughter's babysitting in that house and I need to get hold of someone who lives nearby and ask them to go over there and give her a little help."

"I'm sorry," the metallic voice said even more remotely, "you will have to call the business office in the morning."

Andrew Davidson sat for a moment looking at the telephone. The

cigarette burned his fingers and he dropped it with a flurry of ashes, picked it up hastily and scrubbed the ashes into the carpet with his foot in one practiced motion. He was glad his wife was playing bridge. The situation was bad enough without having a hysterical woman to complicate matters. This way he could concentrate and at least try in an orderly way to straighten things out. He wiped his hands again. It was time now to call the police, he had enough information now so that they could help him. The village police force was not large but it was willing. That was one thing about the suburbs, you got exceptional service. He called the police number that was printed in black on the little sticker the Boy Scouts brought around to put on the telephones for emergency use. The volunteer fire department number was printed on the sticker too, in red.

Lt. Klecka answered the police phone. The village had a chief and a lieutenant and two patrolmen. The chief worked days and the lieutenant worked nights and each of them had a staff of one patrolman to drive the village's only squad car. It took quite a while to explain the situation to Lt. Klecka. He wrote it down at some length as Andrew Davidson explained.

"Okay, Mr. Davidson," he said.

"I never heard of Shady Lane but I'll look it up and have Olson swing by there when he checks in on the radio. Nothing to it."

"Thanks," Andrew Davidson said, a little shaky with relief and gratitude. "Thanks an awful lot, lieutenant."

"Don't worry about a thing."

Andrew Davidson walked out to the kitchen, feeling the coolness of motion on his brow. Suddenly he was hungry. He opened the refrigerator inquisitively.

Back in the living room, the telephone shrilled; he still hadn't turned down the bell. It rang twice more before he could reach it.

Lt. Klecka said apologetically, "Gee, Mr. Davidson, we're having a little trouble. There isn't any Shady Lane in the village."

"I know."

"I went over the maps. There isn't anything like that."

"I know," Andrew Davidson felt the sweat start again. "Did you try some of the other subdivisions?"

"Yes sir," Lt. Klecka said heartily. "We've got a collection of maps here, everything from Spring Valley clear out to Wedgewood. And you know, there isn't a Shady Lane in any of them?"

"Oh, Lord," Andrew Davidson said prayerfully. "I suppose it's a new one."

"Now that's a possibility, Mr.

Davidson. There is quite a new development over there the other side of Briarcroft and it might be in there, all right."

"How can we find out?"

"I don't know," Lt. Klecka said sadly. "We ain't got any map of that yet."

Andrew Davidson did not say anything. There was a long pause on his end of the line, and it made the officer nervous.

"Tell you what, Mr. Davidson. As soon as I can get ahold of Olson in the prowler car, I'll come up and see you. Maybe we can figure something out."

"Yes," Andrew Davidson said in a strange voice. "Thank you."

When the lieutenant hung up, Andrew Davidson dialed Elwood Smith's number. Suzay's voice answered immediately.

"Hello, honey."

"Hello, Daddy."

"Are you all right?"

"Yes," she said. Then she said in a small voice, "Daddy, can't you find me?"

Something was changing in Andrew Davidson. It had changed his voice and now it was changing him otherwise.

"Yes, honey," he said. "I can find you. Just keep on being all right for a little while, and I'll find you."

There was a time to be orderly and reasonable, and then there was

a time when being orderly and reasonable was not worth anything to you any more. Andrew Davidson went to the closet and got his coat. He would go out and drive up and would look at the signposts on the ungraded corners of the raw new streets, and he would find her. It might take all night, but he would find her. He put on his coat and hat and as he passed the stairs, one of his sleeping children upstairs coughed. He stopped, the grip of responsibility icy on him. But now there was a greater responsibility. The sleeping children would be all right. Timmy was five, Jean was eight. He could wake Jeannie and explain to her that he was going out. No, she would be frightened. It would be better to let her sleep. The spectres of disaster rose around him.

Andrew Davidson shook his head to steady himself. He saw terribly in his mind a vision of the house in flames, and the children sleeping. Then he shook his head again, and drew on his gloves. Soft or not, the time comes for hard decisions.

Not listening now for further sounds of the little ones, he went through the dining room and the kitchen and had his hand on the kitchen door when he remembered.

The car wasn't home. His wife had taken it to the bridge party, wherever it was. Where *ever* it

was. He stood with his gloved hand on the doorknob. He didn't know where it was. He didn't know where she had gone. He didn't even know with whom she played bridge. Em and Jackie and Kate, sure. No more than that. He didn't know any of them.

"Lord," Andrew Davidson asked prayerfully aloud, "doesn't anyone know anyone else any more?"

But of course, he knew people. He knew a great many people. There were the Spencers, across the street. He could borrow their car. He went to the front of the house and looked across the street. The Spencer house was dark. Then there were the Morgans, next door. Certainly he could borrow their car. He was on his way to the dining room when he remembered the Morgans were on vacation. Pausing, he saw the lights in Ericksons' house. But the Ericksons had moved West in the Spring. He didn't know the new people. He had never heard their name, and likely they had not heard his.

In the living room, the telephone jangled wildly. Andrew Davidson answered it, hardly recognizing his own voice.

"Daddy," Suzay said. "I just want you to know that I wasn't imagining things."

"I didn't think you were, honey."
"There were two men here."

He felt the panic break in him.
"Not in the house—"

"No. But they rang the back doorbell and when I told them I wouldn't let them in they tried to push the door open."

"Honey—"

"No, listen, Daddy." Her voice was very steady. "I turned the porch light off and on and they didn't like it and after a while they ran off the porch."

"They may come back."

That hadn't been the right thing to say, he realized dumbly. But it did not frighten Suzay.

"I know. And I wanted to tell you what they looked like. In case you need to know later."

"Honey—" the panic was giving way to nausea.

"Listen, Daddy," Suzay said, almost brusquely. "One was older, with pale eyes and not very good teeth. The other one was younger, and dark, and he had kind of a mustache—"

Andrew Davidson sat fighting the sick feeling and his daughter's voice relentlessly described the two men. When she had finished, she said, "I love you, Daddy. Good-bye."

Andrew Davidson felt a sob rise in his throat.

The telephone rang, deafeningly, close to him. He picked it up dully.

"Mr. Davidson," Lt. Klecka said

cheerfully. "I just got hold of Olson. He was at the scene of a little fender bender down on the parkway, but he's coming in now. I'll be up in a few minutes and we'll see if we can locate your daughter."

"That may not be soon enough," Andrew Davidson said dully. He told Lt. Klecka about the descriptions.

"She must be a fine girl," Lt. Klecka said warmly. "I tell you what, I'll get on the radio and see if one of the county cars is in the neighborhood. The Sheriff's office must have a section map that will show even the new streets."

"All right," Andrew Davidson said.

"Buck up," Lt. Klecka said. "You'll hear from us."

Andrew Davidson continued to sit by the telephone. It rang again. It did not even startle him any more. A man who obviously was calling from a list of names asked to speak to Mr. Davidson. He wanted to make an appointment to call. He wanted to talk about selling Mr. Davidson some aluminum siding.

"Please," Andrew Davidson said. "Not now."

"It will only take a few minutes of your time, Mr. Davidson. And the investment will pay off the rest of your life."

"I know," Andrew Davidson

wondered at his own calm. Not calm. Dazed, maybe.

He said, "But I have a brick house."

The salesman subsided. Andrew Davidson did not remember hanging up the phone. He wanted to call Suzay back and talk to her. He wanted to keep her safe and unhurt by talking to her. He wanted to think of something that would keep her safe and unhurt in a single dramatic stroke. He thought suddenly of telling her to turn on all the lights in the house for a signal; to set fire to the roof. Anything. But he couldn't. He couldn't think of anything. He could only think in flickering pictures, like a faulty projector, of Suzay at other times, seeing her clearly but fleetingly in times past, in the blue Sachs dress on her way to her first day in school; the look on her face on the birthday when she had gotten the kitten; the strange new dignity the night of her first date. That wasn't so long ago.

A car came hastily up the street and tires squealed as it swung into his driveway. He caught a glimpse of a long whip aerial and the light mounted above the windshield. He got up hastily and went to the door and a deputy sheriff wearing sergeant's stripes on his uniform came into the house with a burst of orderly strength and direction.

"My name is Torrio," he said heartily. "Now let's get this little girl out of trouble. Where is she?"

Andrew Davidson explained. It was a rather difficult thing to explain to a man who did not live in the suburbs. Sgt. Torrio himself lived in the central city, and given a name and a brief description he could have found any of five million people within its confines inside twenty minutes. It was increasingly difficult for Andrew Davidson to explain things because when he tried to explain he found that he didn't really understand how it had happened himself. In fact, when he came to a lame conclusion, Sgt. Torrio was watching him with a veiled expression and considerably less heartiness.

But then another car came stealthily and swiftly up the street and squealed into the driveway and Lt. Klecka came into the house. The two officers went out in the kitchen and spoke together in undertones. Andrew Davidson sat dumbly by the telephone. He was still wearing his coat, his hat and his gloves. Presently the officers returned to the room.

Sgt. Torrio said to Lt. Klecka, "You get on the telephone and get those numbers. I'll get on the radio and have the dispatcher track it down on a map."

The officers moved with casual

and practiced speed. Andrew Davidson sat down on the davenport. It did not take Lt. Klecka any time at all to get a telephone company supervisor and explain who he was and what he wanted, and to write down the telephone numbers of the other people who lived on Shady Lane.

"There are only two of them, Mr. Davidson," Lt. Klecka said. "It must be a short street."

Sgt. Torrio called something indistinguishable from outside and Lt. Klecka went out to the county squad car. Andrew Davidson felt something in him stir again at the activity; not hope, exactly, but a stubborn spark. He got up and looked at the telephone numbers Lt. Klecka had written down. At least he could do something. He dialed the first number. A child's voice answered.

"Let me speak to your father," Andrew Davidson said briefly.

"My father is down in the basement," the child's voice said. "He doesn't let me answer the telephone."

"Please call him," Andrew Davidson said.

"My mother doesn't let me answer the phone, either."

"Oh Lord," Andrew Davidson said. "Call him, please."

"My mother's in the bathroom," the voice explained.

The child said inflexibly, "My mother's taking a bath."

Andrew Davidson hung up the phone gently. Then he lifted it and dialed another number. The buzzer sounded a long while. His heart was sinking again when someone picked up the phone.

A man's voice said angrily, "Hello?"

"Thank heavens," Andrew Davidson said. "I'm glad you answered. I was afraid you wouldn't." He realized he was babbling and stopped himself. He started over, saying reasonably, "It's very important that I know where you live. How to get there, that is. You see —"

"Wise guy," the man's voice said angrily.

Andrew Davidson sat holding the phone in his hand after the click of the cutoff, staring at it unbelievably. Then he reached over frantically, recovered the dial tone and dialed the number again. It rang interminably. Finally someone picked up the phone and as Andrew Davidson tried desperately to talk, the unknown respondent put the instrument down angrily on a hard surface and walked away from it.

Out in the driveway, the idling engine of the county prowler car roared suddenly. The front door opened and Lt. Klecka shouted in,

"We've got the place located, Mr. Davidson, and we're on our way."

He shut the door, then opened it to shout, "You just relax. Everything will be all right."

Andrew Davidson did not answer. If they're in time, he thought. If only they're in time.

He turned suddenly and dialed the original number. Answer, Suzay, he thought. Please answer, honey. Please be all right. Please.

There was no answer.

He could not think of what might be happening. He could not think at all. After a while he replaced the telephone in its cradle. He got up and walked across the living room, walking like an old man. He took off his gloves and straightened the fingers carefully and put them on the shelf in the closet. Then he put his hat on top of the gloves. Then he took off his coat and put it on a hanger and hung it on the rod in the closet. After that he walked into the dining room, walking very slowly and carefully and took a decanter from the door in the buffet and poured from it into a glass. He was scarcely aware that a car had turned into the driveway. It did not move with the quiet urgency of a patrol car, and it went on into the garage. His wife was home. He would have to tell her something. He sat down at the dining room table, trying to

think of what he would tell her, and how.

The kitchen door opened and his wife said "Hi," breezily, the way she always did coming home, and there was the sound of heels on the kitchen floor. Heels. The sound of heels.

Andrew Davidson looked up. His wife was standing in the archway, her arms akimbo, frowning at the decanter and the glass in front of him but not saying anything because Suzay was standing right behind her. Suzay. *Suzay*.

His wife said, still breezily but with a warning undertone that hinted of something that might be brought up later about the decanter, "You look as though you had a quiet evening, dear."

"Suzay," Andrew Davidson said in a strangled voice. "Where did you find her?"

"At Smiths, of course," his wife looked at him with a measuring kind of a look. "I drove past Sally's to see how she was getting along and Sally and Al were just getting home, so I picked her up and brought her along."

Andrew Davidson started to stand up, he started to say something in an excess of relief and gratitude and love, and then he looked past his wife at his daughter, at his daughter looking at him now as she had never looked at him

before, and he realized that she was not going to say anything. Suzay was not going to say anything at all about the frantic hours. He had a frightening premonition that if he told his wife about it, Suzay would deny the whole thing.

Andrew Davidson sat down again heavily.

"Poor Father," Suzay said gently. "He looks as though he had a perfectly *frustrating* evening."

"Yes," he said. "I did. In a way."

There was nothing else he could say. Nothing he could say would help anything. Somehow Suzay was beyond him now. He did not know whether she truly had been faced with the ultimate in adult danger and survived it alone, and surviving now could look at him with coolness and with pity because he had pitifully failed her; or whether she was only a shallow, idle child capable of unexpected viciousness in her boredom and her fantasy. He saw her through a faint mist, looking at him with the bland secret eyes of knowing, looking at him with a woman's impenetrable eyes.

No, now he would never know.

In the living room the telephone rang again. The cat which had been sleeping uninterruptedly on the drum table leaped in alarm now, at last, and a figurine fell to the carpet and broke softly. His wife talked briefly on the phone and came back.

"Bob Appleby said to tell you that he remembered where Elwood Jones lives, if you still want to know," she said. "Do you know any Elwood Jones?"

"No," Andrew Davidson said thickly. "But then, sometimes it seems as though I don't know a great many things."

He got up from the table and put on his coat. He had to take a walk. He had to go out and head off the prowling cars when they returned. He would have to explain to them that there had been some kind of ridiculous mistake. It would be very embarrassing, but the policemen would understand. They probably were used to people like him, people who were a little confused. They would not ask him what kind of a mistake.



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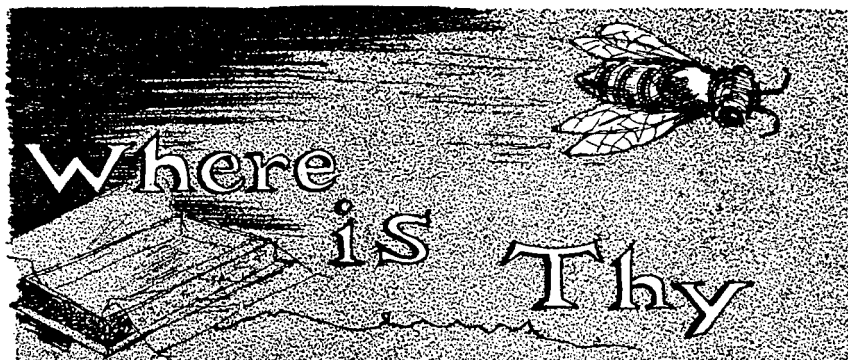
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TO SAY I was flabbergasted when I found out about Doris and that bachelor writer across the hall is putting it mildly.

Doris and I had been married four and a half years then, and I still couldn't believe my luck. She was medium tall, with high color in her face and jet black hair that had a shine to it, and a lovely soft mouth that smiled easily and often. Her eyes were electric blue, and with that black hair of hers, they really looked terrific. And her figure was for happy dreams . . . other guys' dreams. I had the girl herself. My wife, Doris.

So you can understand I was quite upset when I learned about her and Wilkins. If you really love your wife, as I do, and trust her, as I did, and she's just about the living end in beauty of face and figure, and you're sure she thinks the sun rises and sets on you, it's a definite kick in the teeth when you suddenly discover that while

you're out of town covering your sales territory two weeks out of each month, your wife is playing house with the detective-story writer whose apartment is across the hall from yours. Especially, when he's a nothing-type guy like Wilkins was—tall, skinny, no visible means of support except a battered typewriter, and even beginning to lose his hair, for God's sake!

I'm no Adonis, understand, but on the worst day I ever lived, I'm a better man than Wilkins was. Believe me. That's why I was so burned when I found out that Doris whiled away her time during my absence with this Wilkins clown.

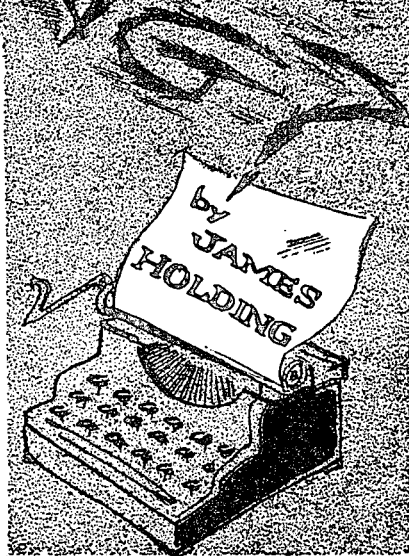
I made excuses for Doris, of course. I still loved her, despite her expeditions to the other side of the hall where the grass looked greener. A girl as beautiful as Doris, I told myself, as full of life and crazy for fun, naturally becomes a target for the wolfishness of every



predatory male within a six-mile radius. And she's understandably lonesome while I'm away. Poor Doris.

I could make allowances for her. But not for that rejection-slip Casanova across the hall. No, sir. Him I was going to fix, and fix right.

But not in hot blood, Jim, I warned myself. Wait until you're calmer. Wait till you can cream him without any chance of being tagged for the job. Otherwise, what will it get you? Nothing but an overcharge of electricity from



Phobia has become an accepted term in this day of parlor-psychiatry. Yet, defined as an irrational fear, is it acceptable as a cause of death? On a death certificate, for example, would "Apiphobia" be acceptable to the coroner?

WHERE IS THY STING?

the state. I'd be dead, and Wilkins would be dead, and Doris would be left all by her lonesome.

So I didn't let on to Doris that I knew a thing about her and Wilkins. I behaved just as usual, and so did she, the clever little actress. And when I ran across Wilkins at the mailboxes in the apartment house lobby, or in the elevator, or dumping trash into the communal incinerator at the end of our third floor corridor, I nodded and smiled in neighborly fashion and he doubtless thought me a very pleasant fellow, as well as a blind fool.

That was all right with me; I just kept my own counsel and watched Wilkins at every opportunity. I was confident that if I had patience enough, and was smart enough, I'd find the proper way to fix his wagon and still appear as innocent of fixing anything as the average garage mechanic.

This went on for several months. And sure enough, early in August, when the weather was pure hot hell outdoors and I was coming home from the public golf course one Saturday after a morning round, I found the handle I was looking for.

I pulled up to park before our apartment house, and when I'd got my car nuzzled into the curb the

way I wanted it, I looked through the windshield and there was Wilkins, getting out of his second-hand jalopy three cars ahead of me, with a big paper sack of groceries in his arms.

He nudged his car door shut with an elbow and started up the drive to the apartment entrance, carrying the bag. As he approached the bed of zinnias and snapdragons that bordered the drive on his left, he suddenly shied like a startled horse and stopped in his tracks. After a momentary hesitation, he began to make a wide circle to his right around the bed of flowers to get to the apartment entrance, clutching the groceries tightly and looking with terrified eyes toward the flowers. And just then, a bee that had been prowling around the flowerbed left his work and buzzed toward Wilkins to investigate him. I could see the bee's wings winking in the sunlight. And that's when Wilkins really flipped.

He'd been watching that bee all along, I guess. And when he saw it coming over to say hello to him as he went by, he came all apart at the seams in one shattering instant. You'd have thought all the fiends in creation were after him, instead of a harmless little honeybee. He yelled something in a strangled voice, dropped his paper sack of

groceries on the concrete drive with a grand splash of breaking milk-bottles, and took to his heels like an hysterical woman frightened by a mad dog.

He swung his arms around him desperately in shooing motions as he ran; he rolled his eyes over his shoulder at the bee to gauge its flight; he fled up the drive in a galvanic tangle of arms and lanky legs and didn't pause until he shot through the apartment entrance and slammed the door shut behind him.

I sat in my car and watched the whole bit. What a jerk, was my first thought, what a colossal, all-American jerk for my wife to fall for—a grown man that's scared of honeybees! And then my second thought came along and slapped me and I knew that this was it, this was what I needed to know about Wilkins.

For no sane adult is as scared of bees as Wilkins seemed to be—not without good and sufficient reasons. It just didn't figure.

I've mentioned that I'm a traveling salesman. But did I tell you what I sell? I guess not. Pharmaceuticals. I travel for one of the big midwestern pharmaceutical houses. And although I'm no M.D., I knew enough medical jazz to dope out Wilkins so he *did* figure.

And I had a nice warm feeling of satisfaction, right away.

I was leaving for my regular August swing around the territory the next day. I'd be gone two weeks, as usual. I looked deep into Doris' wonderful sapphire-colored eyes when I kissed her good-by, and I held her close with more than my usual affection when I left her.

I tended strictly to business for the next ten days, though it was a hard thing to do. I kept remembering that while I was away, that mouse of mine was probably playing like mad with that cat across the hall. But this is the last time, Jim, I told myself. Consolingly.

On the tenth day, I turned aside from my regular route and drove fifty miles out of my way to a little hick town in the northern part of the state. I wandered into the sleepy, half sporting goods, half hardware store there, and bought a dusty butterfly net from a clerk who was either on dope or mentally retarded; I couldn't tell which. I was pretty sure of one thing, though: he'd never remember me or what I bought from him.

I took the net and drove out of town on a country road for a few miles until I spotted a honeysuckle vine blooming on a stone wall that bordered the road in one place. I pulled up on the shoulder, put on

an old pair of work gloves I kept in the car's glove compartment, climbed out and lifted the hood of my car as though I was having engine trouble. I waited until there wasn't another car in sight in either direction on the road. Then, with the butterfly net in my hands, I jumped across the little ditch between the berm of the road and the wall. I made one pass with the net over the honeysuckle vine. That's all I needed. That one scoop netted me six lively honeybees.

Carefully, I shook them out of the net into an old one-pound candy box I'd swiped from the dump in another town, threw a handful of honeysuckle leaves and blossoms in on top of them and clapped on the lid. I cut a few slits in the box for air, wrapped it loosely in a piece of porous brown wrapping paper, tied it with string and addressed the package to Wilkins. I didn't put any return address on it. The whole operation didn't take ten minutes.

I slapped enough stamps from my wallet on the light package to carry it first class mail, and on my way back through the village, I dropped it into the curbside mail box outside the village post office. I didn't even have to get out of my car. I just reached over and flicked the package into the chute

and was rolling again almost before I'd stopped.

That was Wednesday. It was Friday afternoon when I got home from my trip. I parked the Galaxie and climbed out, stretching the kinks out of my muscles after my long drive. I started for the entrance to the apartment house and only then noticed that something unusual was happening.

A police ambulance stood in the driveway, motor running and back doors open. A cop was kicking moodily at a rear tire. He was obviously the driver, waiting for his buddies to bring him a passenger. I nodded to him and went into the apartment and pushed the button for the automatic elevator.

Nothing happened for a minute, but when the elevator finally dropped down to the lobby, the door was pushed open and a couple of cops came out carrying a stretcher. Somebody was lying on the stretcher, but I couldn't see who because a sheet covered him all up, even his face. A fussy little guy with a black bag got out of the elevator after the stretcher, a doctor I supposed. I stood back while they maneuvered the stretcher through the door and out to the ambulance. Then I took the elevator up to my floor.

Doris was waiting for me at the door of our apartment. Her eyes

were big; she looked scared. But she looked so wonderful to me that I didn't think of anything else for a second except her.

"Hi, baby," I said, folding her into my arms before we even had the door shut.

"Hi, traveler," she said, kissing me. She called me traveler sometimes because of my job. "I'm glad you're home, dear."

"Me too." It was the understatement of the week. I sniffed. "Spare ribs?"

She nodded, thinking of something else.

"Good," I said, and threw my hat at the closet shelf. She kept her arm around my waist as we went toward the kitchen together. It was our routine. My first act when I got home from my trips was to mix a martini for us.

I said, "As I was coming in downstairs, they carried somebody out of here on a stretcher. Who's sick?"

She got down the gin and vermouth for me. "Not sick," she said in a shocked voice. "Dead, Jim. It was Mr. Wilkins, the fellow who lives—lived—across the hall from us."

"No!" I said. "What happened to him?"

"They don't know for sure." Doris passed me a tray of ice cubes. Her hand trembled. "He just died."

"What a lousy break. Nice, quiet neighbor, too." I started to measure out the gin into the pitcher. I looked up and caught her eyes on me, and she seemed pretty close to tears. "Why, baby!" I said, turning to put my arms around her. "You're upset. You can't let a neighbor's death get to you like this. That's the way these things happen sometimes, that's all."

"B-but I'm the one who missed him," she explained haltingly. She shivered in my arms. "It j-just occurred to me this afternoon after lunch that I hadn't seen Mr. Wilkins in the hall or elevator the last day or-or two"—she cut her eyes at me to see how I took this explanation—"and when I went out on the landing, past his apartment door, I didn't hear his typewriter tapping, either. You know how the typewriter was always going. You could hear it through the door."

"Sure," I said.

"I went across the hall and rang his bell. Several t-times. When he didn't answer, I thought at first he was out. But then I remembered that he hardly ever went anywhere, especially in summer"—she didn't explain how she was so sure of a peculiar fact like that—"so I called the building superintendent and asked if Mr. Wilkins was away. He said not that he knew of. So I told

him I was worried, and asked him if he didn't think he'd better investigate."

"I see. And the Super went in and found him."

"Yes. He used his passkey. I went in with him. And we found poor Mr. Wilkins lying on his sofa in the living room and not b-breathing at all!"

"Just like that, eh? Boy, that's the way to go. In your sleep."

"But he wasn't lying straight and flat, Jim. Not like sleep. More like he fell on the sofa when he was dying. His eyes were wide open and looked terrified, somehow." She hugged me tightly. "It was h-horrible!"

"Sure, baby. I wish you hadn't seen him like that. A man knows he's dying, he gets that scared look in his eyes. I saw it in the service. It's natural."

"The superintendent called the police emergency squad. And the police doctor came and they took Mr. Wilkins away just now."

"What'd the doctor say? Heart attack, I suppose."

"He didn't know," Doris said. "He couldn't tell for sure without one of those—you know—examinations after you're dead."

"Autopsy," I said. She nodded miserably. My heart was hammering with excitement. I was afraid she'd notice it. I said, "I'm going

to look at Wilkins' apartment, Doris. I guess I'm morbid. I want to see where you found him, poor fellow. Want to come?"

"I certainly don't!" Doris said. "I've had all I want of that dreadful place today!"

"Pour out the drinks," I said. "I'll be back in a minute."

I went across the hall to Wilkins' door. I intended fiddling with the lock, using the key to my own apartment. But I was pleasantly surprised to find the door open. I looked at the sofa where they'd found Wilkins' body. But my eyes didn't linger there a second. They went right on past to the end table beyond, where my candy box lay in the midst of its discarded wrappings, its lid fallen off the table onto the floor.

I grinned, picturing vividly what had happened when those imprisoned bees, innocently released by Wilkins as he opened his mail, had come boiling out of the box. It couldn't have taken long after he panicked and began shooing and striking at them as he almost surely did, because when you're allergic to bee-venom the way Wilkins was, one good dose of multiple bee-stings will collapse your circulatory system and stop your breathing so quick you wouldn't believe it.

I found them in the kitchen. Wilkins had a row of African

Violets blooming in pots on the kitchen window sill, and the bees were buzzing drowsily against the screen over the open window behind the violets, anxious to get out into the warm August air again.

Nobody will ever figure this one out, I told myself. I allowed myself a wise smile as I opened the screen behind the violets and watched the little yellow murderers stream gladly through to freedom.

I went back to Doris and my martini. I took her into my lap as we drank. I thought how nice it would be to have her all to myself again. What a doll! I looked at her fondly. So maybe she was inclined to take up with other men when I was away. Out of sheer boredom only. Just to dilute her loneliness. Nothing else.

Suddenly it occurred to me that there was one good way to put a stop to that: quit this crummy selling routine that kept me on the road half the time.

I put down my empty martini glass and turned her face to me and kissed her. I kissed her good.

I said, "Baby, I've decided to quit my job."

"You what?" She was thunderstruck.

"Yeah. I want to be home more, Doris. With you. I get so lonesome on the road."

"I get lonesome, too, Jim," she murmured contritely into my shoulder.

"Sure you do, honey. And you know what? I've thought of a job that would let me stay right here with you all the time."

She raised her head. "What?"

"Writing detective stories. Like poor old Wilkins across the hall. I think I'd like to try my hand at that." I kissed her again. "I have an idea I might be pretty good at murder."

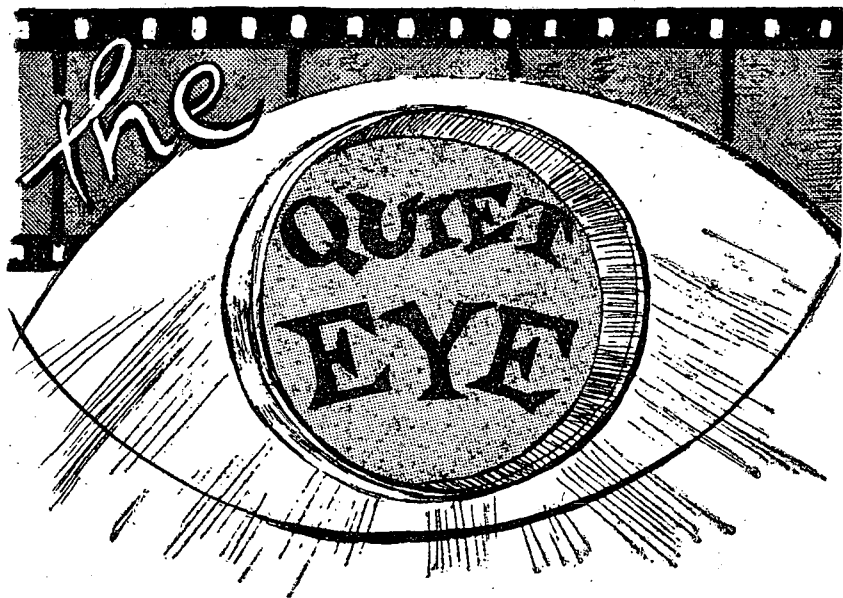
Her arms tightened around me. "Darling, I'd love having you home with me," she said, "but you've never written a story in your life!"

"You've got to start sometime," I said.

So this is the first one.

Did you like it?



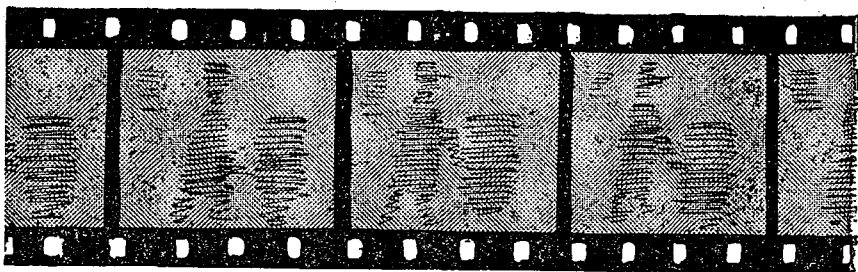


WHEN I got there, the first thing Miss Duncan said to me was, "Lieutenant, we have motion pictures of the robbery *actually* taking place."

While one of the state troopers used a hacksaw on the chain binding her wrist to the water cooler stand, I got her description of the two men. I relayed that to headquarters on my car radio, but there wasn't too much to work on. Both men had worn full-face masks.

Miss Duncan was free and rubbing her wrist when I returned to the bank building. She pointed to a spot under the teller's grill. "That first button on the floor. I stepped on it just as soon as I saw they were wearing masks and one of them pointed a gun at me." Now she indicated a small rectangular opening on the rear wall near the ceiling. "When I stepped on the button, the camera up there *automatically* began taking motion pictures

The presence of an all-seeing eye has terrified the guilty and comforted the innocent, all through the annals of crime. We can thank progress and ingenuity and Monsieur Daguerre for the recorded evidence of this all-seeing eye.



of everything happening out here.”

I noticed that there were two buttons on the floor under the counter. “What’s the other one for?”

“That’s the alarm.”

“Why didn’t you step on that one too?”

Miss Duncan was in her late twenties. She flushed slightly, “But that makes so much noise. A bell ringing, you know. And . . . well, I thought that the man might get nervous or excited and shoot me.”

A hundred or more of the townspeople were crowding outside trying to see what was going on in here. It had snowed early in the morning, but the temperature had risen and now the streets and sidewalks were dirty slush.

The Wallisfield Branch Bank was a small, one-storied building without a vestibule. The entrance doors led directly into a fairly large room cut into two long halves by the partly grilled counter. To the rear, and behind the counter, was the manager’s glass-enclosed office.

“I’d better phone Mr. Bramer

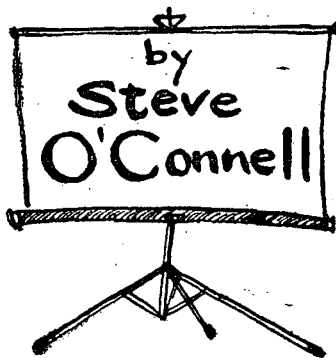
immediately,” Miss Duncan said.

“Bramer?”

“The manager. He’s at a meeting of the board of the R.E.A. Our power plant is trying to negotiate an improvement loan and Mr. Bramer wanted to see exactly what the board plans to do with the money.”

I let her make the call and when she hung up, I said, “Were you the only employee in the bank when the robbery occurred?”

Miss Duncan smiled. “Besides Mr. Bramer, I *am* the only employee. I’m the teller, the clerk, the typist, and what-have-you. This is just a branch bank and a small one—the main office is in Newford—



and we really don't need more than the two of us."

"Were there any patrons in the bank?"

"No. I was the only one here, Lieutenant. The bank opens at nine, and we're usually pretty busy until ten. But from then until perhaps eleven, we have a slack period. Sometimes no one comes in at all."

I got her a paper cup of water and had her start her story from the beginning.

"These two men came into the bank at about ten-thirty. One of them stayed at the front window, watching the street, but the other pulled a gun out of his pocket and came toward me. That's when I stepped on the button." She sipped the water. "He just pulled up the counter top and walked right in behind here. He ordered me to open the vault."

"It was locked?"

"No. The door was just closed. We open the vault at nine and it stays open until we close the bank at three."

"And so you opened the vault?"

"Yes. All I had to do was turn the handle. There was really nothing else I could do, was there?"

"No. You did the right thing."

"This man with the gun had a zipper bag and he just scooped up all the paper money in the vault.

After that he took that chain and the padlock out of his pocket. He chained my wrist to the water cooler stand and blindfolded me. The water cooler is bolted to the floor and I couldn't even reach the phone when they were gone. I just had to wait until somebody came in."

"Did you try to attract attention? Scream?"

"He told me not to make a sound or try to take off the blindfold. He said if I did he'd come back and shoot me. And so I didn't do anything but stand there for about five minutes. Finally, I got up enough nerve to move the blindfold just a little and when I saw that they were *really* gone, I decided to scream. But just then Martin Sawyer came in to cash a check. He runs the supermarket down the street."

I asked for the description of the two men again.

"They were both about five ten, I'd say, though I'm not too good a judge of height. They wore brown hats, brown topcoats, and gloves. And, of course, those Halloween masks. Both were the same. Satan."

I looked at the short length of chain which had bound Miss Duncan to the water cooler. "Did one, or both of the gunmen, rattle?"

She blinked. "Rattle?"

I smiled. "I mean did you hap-

pen to notice, or hear the sounds of other pieces of chain they might have carried in their pockets?"

She was perplexed and so I explained. "The hold-up men faced the possibility of finding not only you here, Miss Duncan, but also Mr. Bramer, and possibly a half a dozen other patrons. Did they expect to chain all of them? That seems a little ridiculous, though we can't discount that. But if they had just *one* length of chain and just *one* padlock, they must have anticipated that you would very likely be the only person in the building. They might *even* have *known* that Mr. Bramer wouldn't be here."

"I still don't see . . ."

"It would establish the fact that they were not simply strangers who happened to be lucky in the time they chose to rob the bank."

She shook her head. "I'm sorry, Lieutenant, but I'm afraid I was too nervous and frightened to notice."

"How much money did they get?"

She gave it thought. "Well, this is Friday. We always get an extra shipment of cash from the main bank on Thursday afternoons. That's to cover the paychecks people around here cash over the week end. And then there's our normal cash reserve." She did a sum in her

head. "I couldn't tell you exactly, Lieutenant, but I'd say it was in the neighborhood of twenty-five thousand dollars."

"You don't know whether they got into a car or not?"

"No. I didn't dare move the blindfold for awhile."

I noticed one of the troopers outside let a man go past him to the front door.

"That's Mr. Bramer," Miss Duncan said.

Bramer was in his middle forties and graying at the temples. He wiped his feet on the mat as he stepped inside, but he needn't have bothered. The black marble floor was already wet and dirty.

He nodded to me and then turned to Miss Duncan. "You're *positive* you turned on the camera, Ellen?"

"Yes, Mr. Bramer. The very first thing."

I glanced back at the opening for the camera lens. "Let's get the film."

Bramer and I went into a small utility room at the rear of the building. He stepped up to the wooden platform on which the camera was mounted and removed the film. "It's wide angle and the film runs for ten minutes."

"Isn't it unusual for a bank of this size to have one of these cameras?"

"Not necessarily. Being small, we're more prey to hold-ups than the larger banks. As a matter of fact we had a hold-up similar to this one three and a half years ago. After that experience the main office felt that it might be wise to install one here."

"How many people besides you and Miss Duncan know that you have a camera up here?"

"Well . . . the people in the main office at Newford and . . ." He hesitated.

I smiled faintly. "And your wife? And her best friend? And the man who installed it?"

He seemed embarrassed. "Yes."

"In other words, just about everybody in town knew about it?"

He smiled ruefully. "I suppose so. It's hard to keep a secret in a small town and we've had the camera for more than three years." He shrugged helplessly. "It got around. I'm sorry to say."

"No need to be sorry. It might actually be a help to us."

He didn't understand that.

"Because it more or less eliminates any local suspects. It's hardly likely that anybody who knew about the camera would allow himself to be photographed while he was robbing the bank. Even if he was wearing a mask."

I assigned men to canvas the neighborhood for possible wit-

nesses or information. I debated sending a trooper to the state laboratory with the film and then decided to go myself. I was anxious to see the film just as soon as it was developed.

I had driven about three miles when a blue sedan roared past me. I was doing the legal limit and so I estimated that he must be doing at least eighty.

I wasn't in the Traffic Division any more and I had other things on my mind, but I *am* a cop and I can't let a thing like that go. I kicked the siren and took after him.

He kept speeding for another mile and then slowed down. I thought he was going to pull off onto the shoulder of the road and stop, but instead he swung into a secondary road. He picked up a little speed again, but not much. The muddy condition of the road made driving tricky. I gained on him and, finally, when we got to a clump of woods in a valley he slowed the car again and this time he stopped.

I pulled up behind him and then hesitated.

There was something wrong about this. I had been driving a State patrol car, plainly marked, and even the most chronic speeder never passes a patrol car when he's breaking the limit. He knows he's inviting a sure ticket.

And there was another thing. When they stop and you pull up behind them, they always turn for at least look at you. They want to see how big you are. But this one didn't. He stared straight ahead up at his rear view mirror and I could almost feel the tenseness in his waiting.

I got out and when I reached the blind spot at the left rear of his car, I slipped my .38 out of the holster and snapped off the safety.

I stopped when I got just behind his left shoulder.

When he knew that I wasn't going to take another step forward, he acted. His right hand flashed up with an automatic, but he had to swing around to use it and that gave me a fraction of a second over him.

My slug shoved him back to the far side of the car and his shot spidered the window wing ahead of me. I tightened for a second shot, but I didn't have to use it. The gun wasn't in his hand any more and the surprise of death froze in his face.

I studied the dead face and had to write him off as a stranger. I went back to my car and radioed State Police headquarters.

Sergeant Spencer, who arrived with one of the first patrol cars, was able to provide an identification. "His name is Jim Tracy and

he lived in Wallisfield. I picked him up on suspicion in a filling station hold-up about a year ago, but I couldn't make anything stick."

Spencer was a narrow-eyed man who had the reputation of never smiling. He watched the body being put into the basket. "The kid must have been drunk or crazy to try something like that just to get out of a speeding ticket."

I shook my head. "I don't think it's as simple as that. He deliberately led me to this spot and I have the feeling that it was just to kill me."

"Why would he do that?"

"I'm on the Wallisfield holdup. The bank had one of those cameras in the back of the building and the whole operation was photographed. I was taking the film to the state lab to have it developed. It's my hunch that he wanted the film."

"How did he know there was a film?"

"Everybody in town knew about the camera. Tracy wasn't likely to be an exception."

Spencer thought about that. "And you figure that Tracy was one of the hold-up men?"

"I'm going to think about it that way for awhile. It might help."

"But that doesn't make sense. If Tracy knew about the camera, why would he let himself be photo-

graphed? The smart thing to do would have been to destroy the film before he ever left the bank."

"Maybe. But on the other hand, if they *let* themselves be photographed, we would most likely come to the conclusion that the job had to be done by people outside of Wallisfield—people who didn't know about the camera. Maybe they wanted us to think that way."

"But *now*. Tracy wanted that film enough to kill for it? Why?"

"I don't know. But it's my guess that he suddenly realized there was something on the film that could make trouble for him."

Spencer followed me to my car. "I'd like to go to the lab with you, Lieutenant. I'm anxious to see the film myself."

I found a farm driveway where I could turn the car around and headed back toward the highway.

Spencer lit a cigarette. "According to the radio descriptions, the two of them were wearing Halloween masks. I don't see how that film's going to help us much."

When I turned into the highway, Spencer thought of something else. "Granted that Tracy knew there was a film. But how did he know that you were the one who had it?"

"There were about a hundred people outside the bank building.

He was probably one of them and saw me take the film can when I left. So he followed me."

"How much money did they get?"

"About twenty-five thousand."

We got the film to the state laboratory in another fifteen minutes and after a rush job of developing, we used one of the laboratory projectors.

The film began abruptly at the point where one of the masked men reached for the countertop and lifted it up.

His partner remained at the front window, occasionally glancing back to see how he was doing.

Ellen Duncan backed away and the gunman said something to her. He waved the gun slightly toward the vault door.

She hesitated a moment and then went to it. She turned the handle down and the door swung open to reveal a shelved recess only two or three feet deep.

The gunman swiftly transferred the cash to his bag and when he finished he turned to Ellen Duncan and motioned toward the water cooler. She moved toward it reluctantly.

He brought a length of chain and a padlock out of his pocket. He wrapped the chain around her wrist several times and then around a leg of the water cooler.

He snapped the padlock through the two end links and then tied a folded handkerchief over her eyes.

He glanced about for a few seconds, apparently to make certain he had forgotten nothing, and then picked up the bag. He spoke a few words to Ellen Duncan—probably the threat to shoot her if she made any outcry—and then went to the front doors. His companion joined him and they left the building and turned out of sight.

It was as simple as that and it took less than five minutes.

The film continued, but there was really nothing more. Ellen Duncan still stood immobile, chained to the water cooler, when the film ended.

I switched on the lights. "See anything that might help us?"

Spencer sighed. "No. Those loose topcoats and the masks make even a rough physical description almost impossible." He frowned angrily. "Why the devil would Tracy want to kill you for this?"

I rewound the film. "Let's run it again."

Except for the portion of the bank directly under the camera, the view of the interior was complete. It was even possible to see into the street hazily. The wall clock showed that the hold-up had begun at ten-thirty-one. Two narrow countertables for the patrons were fastened against the wall to

the left and they held the pens, ashtrays, and the neat stacks of deposit and withdrawal slips.

I ran the film three more times without seeing anything new and then switched on the lights again. "I'll have Bramer and Ellen Duncan take a look at it. They might see something we don't."

I made the phone call and when Spencer and I took the film to state police headquarters, Bramer and Ellen Duncan were waiting for us.

I took them up to our own small projection room and ran the film.

When it was over, I turned to Ellen Duncan. "Did you see anything at all that might help us?"

She shook her head slowly. "No, Lieutenant. I'm afraid not."

"Did you perhaps recognize the voice of the man who spoke to you?"

"No. It was just . . . well . . . an average voice. I don't think I ever heard it before."

"Mr. Bramer?" I said. "Did anything about them seem familiar? The way they walked?"

"No, Lieutenant. Nothing at all."

A police clerk opened the door to say there was a call for me.

I left the room to take the call, and when I got back, Spencer was running the film again.

I waited until he was through. "Our little film is getting famous," I said. "How would you people like to see it on television tonight? The ten o'clock news wants it."

Spencer seemed to be thinking of something else, but he did hear me. "Television?" He was still thoughtful. "That might not be a bad idea at that. A couple of million people watching the film ought to spot something."

I nodded. "That was my idea, too. The station's sending a man to pick up the film at eight."

Spencer took Bramer and Ellen Duncan back to the bank, but I had work to do downstairs.

Two of Tracy's closest friends had been picked up for questioning about the robbery. We kept them until about four-thirty and then I decided that we might just as well release them. They seemed to be in the clear, but I warned them to be available.

Back in my office, I went over the results of our routine checks. The team of auditors from the state had discovered nothing wrong with the bank's books—one of the first things we look for in cases like this—and Bramer himself was in fair financial condition. And he really had been at the R.E.A. meeting. Six people on the board were willing to swear that he had been with them from about nine-forty-

five until the time he had been notified about the bank holdup.

Bramer was a widower and had two adult children, but they were living downstate.

Ellen Duncan had been with the bank only three years and she lived with her father and mother.

There was some town talk that Bramer and Ellen Duncan might become more than merely manager and employee, but that kind of talk was inevitable whether it was true or not.

At five, I decided to call it a day.

When I got into my car, I noticed that the ashtray was full of butts. I took it out and carried it to a trash can.

When I got back to the car, I stared at the empty ashtray for half a minute. Then I closed my eyes and tried to remember.

Yes. I was sure of it.

But I went back into the building once more and looked at the film.

Then I drove to Wallisfield.

I had intended to drive directly to Bramer's home, but I saw that there were lights in the bank and both he and Ellen Duncan were working inside. An elderly cleaning woman was mopping the floor.

I parked my car and went to the door. It was locked, but I rapped on the glass door.

Bramer came to the door. He

looked tired, but he managed a smile. "We close at four, Lieutenant, and are usually finished in here by five, but today's an obvious exception. So many reports to fill out and things to check and re-check. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"I'll wait until you're through."

They went back to their work and I sat down to think things through once again.

At six the cleaning woman finished and left. A half an hour later, Bramer put the last books into the vault and closed it. He lit a cigarette. "And now, Lieutenant?"

I got to my feet. "Did you know that a man named Jim Tracy tried to kill me today?"

Ellen Duncan nodded. "Yes. It's all over town. And just because he didn't want a speeding ticket."

"No. It wasn't that. He wanted that film of the robbery."

Ellen Duncan's eyes appeared to widen. "But why?"

"He was one of the two men who robbed the bank."

Bramer rubbed his jaw. "I don't see why he would want that film. There was nothing that could have identified him."

"No. He was safe on that score. But there was something else he didn't want anyone to notice. Something he suddenly realized." I paused a moment. "Or more

likely he had it quickly pointed out to him by one of his accomplices."

Their eyes flickered, but they said nothing.

I smiled. "I looked at that film a dozen times and I saw nothing—until I stopped looking at the *people* and looked at the bank itself. It was supposed to be ten-thirty and you had been open for an hour and a half. And yet those deposit and withdrawal slips on the counters were in neat orderly piles. Not as though thirty or forty people had pawed their way through them. And the ashtrays were empty and clean."

Ellen Duncan's eyes were wary, but she managed to smile. "It was a slack period, Lieutenant. I straightened the counters myself and emptied and wiped the ashtrays."

"Possibly. But your camera had a view of the street, and yet during the course of the film not a single automobile or pedestrian passed."

"This is a small town and we're off the highway," Bramer said. "I don't think that's too unusual."

"Maybe you don't, but I do. Your town may be small and off the highway, but you *are* on the mainstreet. And one more thing. You were open an hour and a half before the robbery and you'd done the usual amount of business. It had

snowed and the snow had turned to slush. Thirty or forty people had tramped in here. And yet the film showed your floor was *clean*—not only clean, but completely dry.”

I shook my head slowly. “There was *no* robbery here this morning. You staged this whole thing on another day for the benefit of the camera and it’s my guess that you did it on a Sunday morning. At that time of the week, the main street is deserted or almost so. People are either at church or they’re home reading the Sunday papers. When you three performed your little act, it was probably Tracy who watched the street. If he saw anyone coming, you would all cut your performance short and hide. And later, Bramer, after you and Tracy left the building, there was still another danger period. The film still had five minutes to run. So you waited just out of sight. If someone had come along who might see Miss Duncan standing chained to the watercooler, I imagine you would rap on the window and she would crouch down where she couldn’t be seen from the street. And when the film was complete, you re-entered the building and released Miss Duncan. How many times did you have to go through your act and how many films did you use before you could finish without interruption?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Bramer said, but mildly and almost with amusement.

I went on. “After your performance, you simply left the film in the camera and waited for a Friday morning during which no one entered the bank between ten-thirty-one and ten-forty-one. You knew that was the time recorded on the film. Were you lucky the first Friday? Or did you have to wait two or three weeks for the right one to come along?”

I paused, but they said nothing.

“It’s my guess that every Friday morning, you, Bramer, would arrange to be out so that you could have a good alibi in case the question should arise in anyone’s mind. And you’d simply put all, or almost all, of the money in the vault into a bag and take it with you. If someone entered the bank during those crucial ten minutes when the robbery was supposed to have been taking place and filmed, Miss Duncan would phone you and you would bring the money back and wait for the next Friday.

“This morning when no one came into the bank between ten-thirty-one and ten-forty-one, Miss Duncan quickly chained herself to the water cooler. Your ‘robbery’ had taken place.”

Bramer smiled slightly. “Just *suppose* we took the money? What

would you do if we offered you five thousand? A sergeant doesn't make much money, does he?"

"You're wasting your time. And I'm a lieutenant. Not a sergeant."

"Sorry," Bramer said equably. He sighed. "The lieutenant is making a mistake, Ellen, but I suppose there's nothing we can do about it now except go with him."

I drove them to headquarters and when we entered the building, I smelled smoke.

The Communications Sergeant turned from his board. "You just missed the excitement, Lieutenant. We had a little fire here. Nothing really serious. We put it out with extinguishers ourselves. But our projector got ruined."

I took the stairs up two at a time. A janitor was cleaning up and Sergeant Burrows watched him idly.

"How did it happen?" I asked.

Burrows shrugged. "Short-circuit in the machine, I guess. I wasn't there. Spencer was running the thing when the film suddenly flared up. He got a hand burned trying to put out the fire before he thought of getting the extinguisher."

I left the room and at the head

of the stairs I paused. Spencer had just come out of the room where we keep our first-aid equipment and his right hand was bandaged.

He looked across the room at Bramer and Miss Duncan, and then Spencer, the man who never smiled, showed even white teeth and he nodded almost imperceptibly.

I stared down at him and remembered Bramer's voice—a *sergeant* doesn't make much money, does he?

How much had Spencer sold out for, I wondered. Five thousand? Ten? Had he gone to them? Or had they come to him? And when did they make their arrangement? When I left them alone in our projection booth to answer the phone? Or later when Spencer drove them back to the bank?

But a crooked cop is a bad cop.

Did he think that I was going to let the television people pick up a prime piece of evidence like that film tonight without taking the precaution of having some copies made?

I had taken care of that in the afternoon.

I walked down the stairs. And this time I smiled.

CONSIDER a family deep in the suburbs of Westchester on this Monday morning in June; the breakfast half-hour.

Judy, age thirteen, having eaten in a semi-standing, gobbling position has just raced out of the house for school. The cereal she had displaced littered her place-mat and its environs. A half-glass of milk, that she hadn't managed to down, remained, a tower amid the debris. Also left behind were her parents: Harry and Thelma Smalley.

"If that kid would just get up five minutes earlier—" Harry began.

"I know, I know," Thelma interposed.

And as Thelma tidied up her daughter's mess, she said in her lilting way, "Harry, they are only young once, and I just read, it was yesterday, in the *Reader's Digest*, that they are teen agers for only six years."

"Too many confounded liberties," Harry growled as he surveyed the front page of the morning paper.

"This is a different world, Harry, than when you were a boy."

"Unfortunately. Yeah, unfortunately. Just look." He rustled the paper. "Every morning it's the same thing. Juvenile crime. Murder all over the place."

THELMA SMALLEY

"—she wouldn't have to behave like a tornado at the breakfast table."

Thelma, a typical suburban matron, tall, attractive, bright-eyed, active in her community, guardian of her home, placed Harry's orange juice before him. He seized it and downed it with one swallow, throwing his head far back.

Thelma poured Harry's coffee, grouped the creamer and the sugar nearby, for his convenience. "It's a post-Freudian world we're living in," she said, "you know that, Harry. And it's a world in which we each have to do our bit for society."

"Yeah," Harry grumbled, nodding vehemently, antagonistically—

What we have here, in this Comedy of Errors, laid in Suburbia, is proof, if we need it, of the validity of the slogan: "Never Underestimate The Power of a Woman."



clearly superior to all her literary tea, woman club, lecture series jargon. No doubt about it, their marriage rested securely on the conviction, on the part of each, that the other could not make it in the world alone.

"And this kind of a world calls for imagination," Thelma said. "More toast, dear? You should think creative imagination."

the sublimation of our energies. It most certainly does."

"Okay. Okay. Any more toast, there?"

Thelma absently passed the toast to Harry. "You know, we're approaching our middle years." Her shoulders lifted and fell with her sigh. "And Judy, well she's growing up. She's not our baby—any-



VS. CRIME

by Glenn Andrews

"Why? What am I, a poet, for Pete's sake?"

"Imagination would help your business—which suffers from a horse and buggy attitude. And another thing, Harry, you should think of something besides business. You should. You'll reach the golden years and you'll find your life just empty. Maturity calls for

more. You'd die if you heard what she said to me, the other day. Anyway, that's why I'm off on my project today."

"Project! Now what! This isn't going to cost me any money is it?"

"I'm not going to tell you what it is, Harry. You'll just laugh. I know you will. You always do. Basically, Harry, you're cynical.

You know you are."

"Hah!" And Harry bit into his toast noisily, ogreishly.

"But I will give you a hint." She laughed girlishly, coyly. "What I'm going to do will be for the good of the community."

"Hah!"

"It will, Harry. It will. You're not trying to guess. I-I suppose I should give you some clues. PTA. Book publishing is another clue. And juvenile delinquency is another one. Oh, but you'll never guess it."

"Now see here, Thelma, don't you go getting yourself into any trouble. And be yelling for me to bail you out."

"Hah!" Thelma said, with the superior smile and lift of head, of one who's had the last word.

Consider the Robin Hood Press, presumably publishers of gentle books for impressionable children, actually a facade, a nefarious front.

In a bull pen—departmentalized by varnished fences, behind a somewhat bare reception entry—were rented desks, empty filing cabinets, three men, Sterling "Phil" Rodney, Smith and Louie, and the air of desperation bred of boredom.

Sterling "Phil" Rodney looked like the president of the "company" and he was. Executive proportions

—king-size. Gruff, when not belligerent, but only because he was incessantly maligned by a stupid world. Clearly, he was a leader of men, not as yet apprehended.

Phil moved about unhappily. And catching sight of a pair of feet up on one of the desks, he strode to Louie with angry delight, for they were Louie's feet, and jerked them off the desk with a savage twist.

"I'm sorry," Louie whined, being slight and blond and a follower of men.

"Louie hasn't had our advantages," Smith pointed out, being larger of intellect and ego than Louie. "He was brought up in a one-cuspidor home. As for his heredity, little is known of it's true nature."

"All right," Phil said, with a somewhat forgiving wave of his hand. "You gotta remember, Louie boy, I'm touchy, I'm restless, I want to get going on a job."

And this was all very true. And after the job, as he'd told his boys many times, they'd lay low in South America for awhile.

"I like that gas station," Phil said.

"Right," Louie echoed. "Me, too, Phil. Gas stations are always good."

"No, no, no, no," Smith said. "They may be a stable operation,

I grant you, but they're no good for us. You have to remember that our last two jobs were gas station jobs. Another one, and you got yourself an m.d. And the cops have got it down on their little IBM cards. Anyhow gas stations have too many credit slips in their register these days. You remember how it was the last time."

"Yeah, I remember," Phil said. And then he bellowed, "So where are we?"

As on cue, Thelma Smalley's head appeared at the barely opened door. "Yoo hoo," called she.

Louie and Smith raced for desks and the appearance of diligence. Phil moved almost as quickly toward Thelma, assuming his understanding of a publisher's dignity was what slowed him up.

"Yes, lady?" he said, making both a question and a challenge out of it.

"Oh, dear," Thelma said, entering the office now, in her entirety. "This is the first time, you know, that I've been in a publishing office." She looked about enraptured, at the varnished-fence bull pen, the rented desks, the empty filing cases, at Louie and Smith bent at their work. "So this is a publishing office?"

"Yeah," Phil said, his tone bearing a chip on its shoulder.

"Should I have called for an ap-

pointment? But this is the first time, you see, that I've ever been in a real—"

"I was just dictating a letter," Phil said, importantly. "Now, what can I do for you today?"

He then opened a varnished gate in the varnished fence, thus welcoming her to a chair beside his desk and to Robin Hood Press.

"I don't want to take up too much of your time," Thelma said.

"I know you—you just must have scads of writers to see. I belong to a book club. I find it such a convenience, don't you? You don't have to go out in all kinds of weather just to buy a book, but the mailmen have to go out—that's a tradition with them—so why not have them bring you the book, is what I think. But that isn't the point. And I should get to the point, instead of rambling as I do. Harry says I ramble. Well, I'm here representing the PTA of Grover Cleveland Junior High School."

Phil nodded, and kept nodding, his mien most serious.

"And we girls of the Grover Cleveland High School PTA, eager to do something of value to the community, have started a drive to get publishers to do books that will capture the imagination of teenagers. So that instead of committing crimes, they'll just read

about them. They all like crime. We all do, as a matter of fact, don't we?" And Thelma giggled girlishly, and wriggled a bit on the seat in the process and added, "I don't know why it is, but we do. We certainly do."

As though corroborating Thelma's generalization that all mankind is interested in crime, the mere statement caused Louie and Smith to arise from their desks and wander over to Phil and Thelma. They were duly introduced. And with this increase in her audience, Thelma really warmed to her subject. The crimes used in children's books should be clever and exciting—as different as the bouffant. Their authors should never be inhibited by facts."

"Wonderful," Smith said.

Phil did some more nodding and said, "Yeah."

And Louie, timid about improving on any statement by his boss, also said, "Yeah."

Then Phil, playing the big publisher, told Thelma, "We're having a meeting next week, and at that time we'll go into this. All this stuff, you know, that you proposed."

"Fine. Oh, that's just fine." Thelma stood up and straightened her dress and tugged at her girdle. "I'll tell the girls what you've said. We thought we should come to

you first, because you are a local publisher. Then we plan to go to some in New York. We saw a notice about you in the Shopping News. I hope the Welcome Wagon didn't forget you. Oh, but I'm sure they didn't."

The instant Phil got back from showing Thelma to the outer door, each man reacted in his own individual way. Phil swore. Louie shook his head and muttered. And Smith said, "Do you think that there could conceivably be more like her in the PTA?"

"We've got to move, and we got to move fast," Phil said. Enough of this—this—"

"Vacillating," Smith said.

"Now look here, Smith," Phil said, using his forefinger for punctuation. "So they had a lot of books up in San Quentin, and you know words and you figured out this for us—but I'm still boss, so don't get big ideas and get smart-alecky. I'm for having the setup like so: It's a gas station stick-up. And then it's South America, no cops, no pressure, no nothing."

"I'm sorry to disagree," Thelma said, walking with a gay rhythm towards the three men. "And please forgive me for intruding this way. Harry—my husband—says I'd leave my head someplace, if it wasn't fastened to my shoulders. There they are. Of course." She picked

up the pair of white gloves draped over the varnished railing. And as she put them on, she said, "I should have put them on before. Oh, this is what I want to say, I do hope your story conference isn't over. That idea of crooks holding up a gas station and then going off to South America is terribly, terribly old fashioned. You should be able to think up something better than that. You know, something our youngsters would be willing to stay home to read."

"We do our best," Smith said.

"I've an idea." Thelma's eyes were alight; she held a forefinger to her chin. "A supermarket. There's that big new Qual-Li-Tee Market on Linden Avenue. Our youngsters know about supermarkets. They work in them after school, you know—"

"Yeah, yeah," Phil said and grasped Thelma's elbow in his big hand. "We'll be in touch with you. We'll call you."

"Well, for heaven's sake, I hope you don't do a book about robbing a gasoline station. It's so old fashioned that—"

"This new supermarket on Linden Avenue," Smith said, "is probably impregnable. No criminal in his right mind would attempt to —"

"Oh," she wagged a finger at them, "that's what *you* think. I

happen to know exactly how that new Qual-Li-Tee supermarket could be robbed."

Phil let go of Thelma's elbow. Smith said, "Yes," expectantly.

And there was a silent air of waiting about Louie.

Thus encouraged, Thelma told them all they needed to know. The money taken in on Saturday—more money than on any other day in the week—was not put in the bank depository on Saturday night. A token amount was deposited, just to fool anyone who needed to be fooled. But on the quietest morning of the week, Monday morning, the store's manager arrived at the store a half hour before opening time, took the remaining money from the safe, where it had spent a safe and sane week end, and then went to the bank with it and deposited it.

"All we'd have to do then—" Phil started to say.

"You mean all that the crooks in the story would have to do," Thelma corrected him, "would be to get into the store—around the back, they could get in there, oh, I'm sure they could with burglar tools and all—and wait for the manager to come and open the safe for them. Then all they'd have to do would be to tie him up and take the money. And then, instead of having them run off to South

America, like they've been doing for years, they could stay in the same town and do something else criminal. Oh, but it would be good to have some way to have them caught."

"Indeed," Smith said.

"It's not good to have our youngsters think that crime pays," Thelma said. "I should think not, when all along all these years we've been saying that it doesn't. We parents, once we contradict ourselves, are in trouble," she nodded emphatically, "trouble, real trouble."

"Yeah," Phil said, his big manly face furrowed, creased and distorted by thought. "One thing. One question. How come you know all about how to knock over—rob—rob—I mean rob this new supermarket?"

"I can understand your asking that," Thelma smiled brightly. "Well, this is how it all came about. Tom told me. Now Tom is the boy who deposits the tiny bit of money on Saturday night. And Tom does our lawn for us. But when we went away on our vacation, Harry and I just wondered if Tom was reliable enough for us to leave taking care of the whole place. And so to prove how reliable he was, Tom told us how he takes the supermarket money to the bank on Saturday nights."

"I gottcha," Phil said, nodding.

"What's the address of this new Qual-Li-Tee supermarket?" Smith asked. "I'd just like to look it over—merely for the sake of authenticity."

"You're going to use it in a book!" Thelma exclaimed delightedly. "You are? Well, wait'll I tell the girls . . . Oh, you can't miss it. Ask for Mr. Gerhart. He's the manager. He's very nice. He always cashes my checks. Now you go straight down Linden, past the viaduct, and there's that big empty lot where the new Episcopal Church is going to be built—"

"We'll find it," Phil said. "Sure. Sure . . ."

Tuesday morning. Breakfast again at the home of Harry and Thelma Smalley. This time their daughter Judy was not present, nor was there the usual littered evidence that she had gobbled her breakfast in frenetic haste.

"Eat your eggs, dear," Thelma said solicitously, and with the put-upon patience of a wife. "They always get cold when you don't eat them and just sit there and read that paper."

Harry rustled the paper in his agitation. "As her father, it just seems to me that Judy could spend a little more time at home."

"I told you," Thelma said, pouring a steaming stream of coffee into Harry's cup, "that Susy Lichtner has asked Judy time and again to stay over and Susy's mother, who's president of the Westwood Branch of the Federated Ladies is just—"

"Thelma, will you stop rambling, for Pete's sake? I know all that." He lowered his head to the hot, filled cup of coffee and sipped at it tentatively like the doe at eventide. "This is too blasted hot, Thelma. Do you have to make my coffee this burning hot?"

"Now darling, quiet down. You're upset about Judy. Do you know that ninety percent of our contemporary illnesses—"

"I'll tell you what I'm upset about."

"—are caused by overemotionalism. I'm glad you agreed to help with the charity drive; you'll find it soothing."

Harry rustled the newspaper, squirmed on his seat. "Just look at this paper. Arms race. Rackets. Robberies. A whole moral disintegration has set in; that's what's bothering me. And when you come to breakfast and don't find your daughter there—Why, for Pete's sake, I never see her anymore."

"Try your coffee now, dear," Thelma said.

"Look at this. That new super-

market held up. Probably by juvenile delinquents—maybe by boys Judy goes out with."

"Will you please—eat—your—eggs, dear?"

And it was at this point, in hovering over her loved one and his paper that a word caught Thelma's eye. It was the word QUAL-LI-TEE.

"Oh! Oh!" It were as though the expletives were squeezed out of Thelma. "Why, if that isn't ever a coincidence," Thelma said, delightedly, leaning over Harry's shoulder. "And poor Mr. Gerhart was tied up just like I said. Why, Harry, you know what this proves —"

"What? What, for Pete's sake? And will you take the paper before you push my nose into my coffee?"

"It proves, dear, that the story I told Mr. Rodney, you know, the publisher, could have happened, because it did happen. And that, Harry, is good, because a book above all should be convincing. True to life."

Before Harry could even grumble, the phone rang. And Thelma answered. It was Sterling "Phil" Rodney. He and his associates were so pleased with her work that they wanted her to come in for another story conference.

"Now what do you think of your little wife, Harry darling?"

Thelma asked, after she had told Harry all about the call.

"Now—now—now you just watch your step," Harry said. "Don't you think you're so smart."

"All I'm doing is my bit for society."

Sterling "Phil" Rodney, Smith and Louie sat in sundry spots and in assorted positions. They waited expectantly, as they watched Thelma pace about the bull pen. She made something very dramatic out of the creative process.

"Well, what do yuh say?" Phil asked, finding the waiting difficult.

"Shhhh," Smith said. "Incubation. The fashioning of an idea can't be rushed."

Louie just sat.

Thelma stopped, and the three men stiffened.

Phil got off the corner of his desk "Yuh got it?" he asked.

"Shhhh," Smith said.

"I have got it, Mr. Rodney," Thelma said joyously. "My husband's place of business would be just wonderful—"

This caused Phil to look at Smith and Smith to look at Phil, disbelief expressed by the exchange.

"—for a robbery," Thelma finished. Then she laughed coyly and added, "For a story book robbery, I mean, of course. And here is something interesting, very interesting."

"Yeah?" Phil said, proddingly.

"My husband over this week end is going to keep all the General Charities Fund collection in his safe. You know I've been after that man to be a little more civic minded and at last, at last, I got him to do a little something. You know you don't live by bread alone. Oh, but to get back to what I was saying. The robbers are out to get this charity money. And that—heaven knows—will make them unsympathetic. It'll—it'll just be like stealing money out of a blind man's cup."

"Yeah. A sure thing," Phil said as in reverie, nodding.

"And if there's one thing our youngsters don't like it's poor sportsmanship. You see what I mean?"

"Check," Phil said.

"Check," Louie said.

"Mrs. Smalley," Smith said, "you are a veritable gold mine of ideas. After this one, gentlemen, I think we'll be ready to go to press. Now for the details. Every last detail. Remember authenticity is next to Godliness."

"Yes," Thelma said and laughed girlishly, "I guess it is. I never thought of that. You put things so nicely, Mr. Smith. So much imagination. Creative, you know. Now I'll tell you exactly how they can escape with the charity money."

"So tell us," Phil said.

"Oh, but only temporarily," Thel-

ma said and held up a cautionary forefinger. "They are criminals, you know, and they have to be caught at the end of the story. There's another thing I forgot to tell you, the setting for the story will be so much better than the supermarket one. My husband, you see, is in the toy distributing business. He isn't doing well though; but it's all because he needs a fresh approach. I keep telling him, Harry—"

"The details, Mrs. Smalley," Smith said. "Remember?"

"I do ramble, don't I. Harry's always setting me back on the track. But my husband is so old fashioned. No night watchman at his place of business. No burglar alarm. An extra key under the mat at the side door as you come up to the building on the Wilson Avenue side. Well, this is all the crooks have to do to get the charity money, and to make their escape . . ."

Thelma bent far over the opened dishwasher as she struggled to get a dinner plate in the rack. And at the same time, she said to Harry, "I told you Judy was going to be at her CYV meeting tonight. There." Thelma straightened victoriously; she'd gotten the plate in the rack. She looked at Harry, just finishing tying his tie. "I should think, Harry, that your evenings could be used

for something other than business."

"Now, just a minute. Aren't you the one always harping about my getting some new ideas? And maybe I will—who knows?—from this big-shot-executive's lecture."

"Your evenings should be your own," Thelma stated with the firmness of dogma. "For civic things, for cultural things."

"Sure. Oh, yeah. Sure. Sure."

"I mean it. You know, Harry, I'll tell you something. Now don't laugh. You just listen to me. What I did for Mr. Rodney's publishing firm, I'm sure I could do for your business."

"Oh, no. Oh, no. Thelma. That's all I'd need would be a woman sticking her nose in."

"Imagination. That's what you lack, dear. I wish you would read that article on imagination. I'll bet if I just went into your place and just looked around I could get a lot of ideas to improve business. Tomorrow night when I give my report to the girls at the PTA, they'll just be amazed at what I've accomplished at the Robin Hood Press. I'm sure they will."

After he left, Thelma briskly collected magazines. This was going to be a cultural evening, ammunition for her golden years.

Thelma opened a magazine, but she didn't read. Her thoughts were of Harry's business troubles. She

gave her head a little jerk as she came to a decision, put the magazine down and her reading glasses in their case.

Thelma approached the Wilson Avenue side door through the balmy dusk of a June evening. She moved purposefully. Reaching the door, she squatted and ran her hand under the mat. Then she picked up the mat and saw that the key was certainly not there.

She tried the door, not expecting it to be open, but it was.

What Thelma saw was a tableau, consisting primarily of three men grouped about a safe. There were also tools, sprinkled like a garnish, on the floor. The only light was over the men and the safe and the tools; the rest of the building was lost in a vast, brooding darkness.

A moment, no more than that, and Thelma realized Mr. Phil Rodney was a robber; Mr. Smith and Louie, confederates; she a pawn. She remained motionless in the darkness, aghast, continued to look at the tableau.

Mr. Rodney had his shoulder up against the safe; Louie was as close. They worked on the safe door, with what looked like a crowbar.

Thelma thought, "Why they've no respect whatsoever, for other people's property . . ."

It was this thought which brought her to the realization that Rodney-Smith-Louie had also robbed the Qual-Li-Tee Market, and that that made her an accessory before the fact, which—though it had a status ring to it—was little comfort.

By now, Mr. Rodney and Louie had wrenched the safe door partially open; it hung like a painfully broken wing.

"Oh, Harry's not going to like what they've done to that door at all," Thelma whispered in the darkness.

Mr. Rodney reached into the safe with one arm, his whole side to the opening, his shoulder as well as his arm in the opening. He grunted, each time he shoved forward, obviously trying to reach farther into the safe. Then he suddenly pulled his arm out. And in his hand was a heavy-looking, leather, padlocked money bag. Across the bag in large black letters: SMALLEY TOYS, INC.

Thelma took a step toward the men, and another one. She felt like going right up to them, snatching the bag right out of that Mr. Rodney's hand; and telling them all what she thought of them.

But she told herself, "Thelma, you have to be cool. You have to be cool and clever. They're the ones who catch crooks, the cool and clever ones."

Over the safe was a small mezzanine area, where Miss Evans and Johnny Calconi, the bookkeeper, worked. From just the light above the safe, Thelma could make out that the thousands of hula hoops Harry had delayed buying until the craze was on the wane, were still there. That was exactly why she had come in the first place, just to look around to tell Harry the things that were wrong and might be starting him right in the face without his seeing them.

Thelma felt suddenly cool and clever. She could tiptoe up the steps to the mezzanine and drop hula hoops down over the shoulders of Mr. Rodney, Mr. Smith and Louie, one hula hoop after another, and they'd find themselves as helpless as though tightly bound with rope. But she didn't start tiptoeing. She remembered the night Harry had taken her bowling and had said "*never again.*" Those old hula hoops would also probably fall everywhere, but where she wanted them to go.

And then she remembered another mistake Harry had made. He'd manufactured recordings of the actual sounds made during a simulated ambushade by the FBI of some criminals holed up in a mountain lodge. The records hadn't sold. They weren't exciting enough, for there were too many long stretches

of pseudo government men breathing or else walking on brittle twigs.

Mr. Rodney and Mr. Smith and Louie, Thelma saw, were busily collecting their burglar tools. They were getting ready to go. In another minute, they'd be gone and so would the General Charities Fund money.

So Thelma had to hurry. She didn't even tiptoe. She walked quickly over to where Harry had set up a record player, so that buyers could hear the FBI record. This was ages ago, but you could rely on Harry—and for once she was glad—for the record player with a record all ready to roll was still there.

Despite the poor light, Thelma got the record going. She remembered that the beginning of the record was the best part; it was before all the twig snapping.

"Come on!" the record said. The volume was too low and Thelma hurriedly turned it up. "All right, men!" blared too loudly. Thelma adjusted the volume so that "Let's get 'em!" came out just fine.

The three men froze in their respective positions. They now constituted another tableau, its emotion, fear, desperation.

Thelma moved quickly. On her way, she picked up an authentic, down to the last detail, Jim Dandy Frontiersman Colt, Model #27XB, \$155 a gross.

"Well, I'm really and truly surprised at all of you," Thelma said as she emerged from the darkness and entered the light. "Especially at you, Mr. Smith. You are intelligent. You do speak so well, so—so very cultured. Surely, Mr. Smith—"

"You're going to hurt yourself with that gun, lady," Louie said.

"Shut up!" Phil yelled at Louie.

"Don't make any false moves," the record warned. "We've got you surrounded."

"See?" Thelma said, triumphantly. "Now go ahead, I'm going to take you just up the street to the police. Go on. Move—"

"You surrounded, you surrounded, you surrounded" the warped record said. "You surrounded, you surrounded," it continued to say.

Thelma turned to see what had happened to her reinforcements.

As one, the three men were on her, and busied themselves—oblivious of her protests—tying her to a chair.

"You surrounded, you surrounded . . ." the record went on.

"Why, in heaven's name," Thelma demanded, "must robbers always tie people to chairs? You have no imagination at all. If you had, you'd . . ."

"You said you put the adhesive in the bag," Phil said, glaring at Louie. "I asked you. Now we got no adhesive for her mouth."

"Got you surrounded," the record said. "Got you—"

"Publishing," Thelma said. "I just can't remember who it was who said publishing is a sacred trust. It might have been Clifton Fadiman. He used to be on Information Please. You remember?"

"Put another knot around here," Phil said to Smith, "in the back."

"You really shouldn't give up publishing. Our youngsters need the right kind of books. And that—you know—was why I was trying to help you. And I—"

"You were of immeasurable help to us," Smith said.

"Oh, thank you," Thelma said, her eyes brightening.

"You not only told us where to go and what to do," Smith said, "but also how to make our exit under the cloak of darkness and through deserted by-ways. And, because we trust your unerring accuracy, we did not feel obliged to double check. I do speak with a certain charm, don't I?"

"Yes, yes, you do," Thelma admitted. "But charming is as charming does, you know."

Smith took a paper from his pocket. "Now here are your directions just as you gave them—without, of course, the extraneous verbiage. 'The crooks go out the back door.' You listen to this Phil and Louie. 'The back door opens onto

an alley. The crooks'll go straight past the rear of the drugstore and the movie theatre. And next to the movie is a building in the process of construction. They'll go through it, then cross the street—it's a quiet street—and they'll see a space between two buildings. They'll go through, between the buildings. Turn left in the alley, till they come to an empty brick building. They'll be able to go right through it because the owners have been trying to rent it and its front and back doors are open. Then they go up the street to the municipal parking lot where their car is parked."

"Check," Phil said.

"Check," Louie said.

"You're all just awful, just simply dreadful," Thelma said to the men as they left. And then she felt a stirring of hope that they'd get exactly what was coming to them.

Mr. Rodney, Mr. Smith and Louie returned with two policemen.

"Hello," Thelma said. "You've kept me sitting here for a long time and all tied up. But I really didn't mind too much."

No one answered. A policeman got down on one knee next to Thelma and got very busy untying her.

"It just served you right," Thelma said. "You just thought I was going to be your little pawn, didn't you?"

"My dear," Mr. Smith said, elegantly. "The empty building in the directions you gave us was *not* an empty building."

"I know that," Thelma said. "You don't have to tell me. But I thought how wonderful for the story, if it were an empty building, for the crooks to go right through to the next street so that there'd be less chance for them to be seen by anybody. After all, I wasn't planning *your* escape."

"Do we have to listen to her?" Phil asked the policemen plaintively.

"And when you're doing a story," Thelma went right on, "that's one thing you have to be is imaginative. You know, literary license. So I just changed that police station into an empty building, for the sake of the story. There was no reason why I shouldn't. And I think by so doing I've done a public service—in having the police catch you. I just read an article about imagination. I gave it to Harry to read, but he wouldn't. And it said that people today—eighty-nine point two percent of them—just don't use their imagination enough..."



*'A WOMAN'S
WORK IS
NEVER DONE'*



Behind every successful man, we are told, is a woman. We might add, an ambitious and hard-working woman, looking for a replacement when the incumbent has served her purpose.



COBB MEEKINS sprawled in the shade of the old persimmon tree, his hat over his eyes, lifting a languid hand now and then to brush away a buzzing Junebug or a prospecting ant, as he listened to the steady whack-thud, whack-thud, which came from the hollow where his land cornered with True Bingham's.

The toe of a boot nudged his elbow.

"Who's there?" Cobb asked, not moving.

"Want to go fishin'?" Billy Bod Shaker's voice inquired.

"I been."

"Catch anything?" That was Luke Lacey's drawl.

"Cat."

"How big?"

"Twenty pound."

Silence for a moment.

Then, "Sounds like old True's workin' fit to kill over to his place," Billy Bod said. "What's he doin' now?"

"Poundin' post holes, I reckon," Cobb murmured.

Old True's already got the finest farm and the most land of anybody around, he thought, but he don't aim to be satisfied, looks like, until he's fenced in the whole valley.

"Where'd you say you hooked that cat?" Luke asked.

"Didn't."

"Twenty-two pound, huh?" Billy Bod's voice was rich with admiration.

"Twenty-five." Cobb lifted his hat briefly. "Pulled him in the other side of the river bend."

After they'd gone, he settled back and resumed his resting.

Cobb was a small man with mild blue eyes, a stubble of tawny whiskers and hair to match, but he was large with ambition and extravagant dreams; a new roof on the sagging cabin—could he but spare the time to it, a herd of fat

*Helen by
Fislar
Brooks*

cattle grazing his hillside—did he but have the strength to clear off the rock, or if the price of stock would only go back to what it used to be. In his Pap's day, he'd heard tell, a good critter could be bought for seven-eight dollars. Figured out to about a cent a pound.

A good pole barn full of bottom-land hay would be mighty fine, too—if only he could call to mind where he'd laid his axe a year or so back. Couldn't cut poles or chop out brush and sprouts without an axe. And at one end, was it cleared, he'd have him a corn patch that would crop out twenty gallons to the acre and still leave enough over to feed all the hogs and chickens a man could want.

Then, if he had all that, he'd buy some store clothes and go courting. It would mean square dancing and sitting up straight, knees together, on a slat-back chair two-three nights a week, both of which were mighty hard on a man's legs and spine, but somebody would have to hoe that corn and slop the pigs and feed the chickens and such—it wouldn't be fitting a man should do a woman's work.

"Yes, sir," he murmured, "with a little luck, I could have just as much as old True—maybe more. But ain't no sense killin' myself, like he's doin'. Somethin's bound to happen, sooner or later. My

Pap always said it was a long road didn't have no turnin'. I got plenty of time. I'm only thirty-two or thereabouts."

On this comforting thought, he fell asleep.

At noon, he awakened, considerably restored—but hungry. Stepping over the gaps in the broken flooring of the lean-to porch, he entered the cabin, set out the jug and fried the catfish. It didn't quite fill the pan, but if he held back, he decided, he could stretch it enough to take care of his supper, too.

Refreshed and strengthened by the food and drink, he returned to his resting place under the tree. Then, noting the sound of True's pounding and whacking had changed to an occasional flinty ring of pickaxe on rock, he rose and wandered toward the hollow, reflecting he'd best see what True was up to. That fence was apt to be scooching over ten-twenty feet on the wrong side of the line.

True was nowhere in sight, but whatever he was up to had nothing to do with post holes. A shovel and a length of rope with a bucket tied to one end lay next to a high hill of dirt alongside a circular hole. It made Cobb tired just to look at the piled up earth.

Must have took a sight of heavin' and haulin', he thought.

Off by itself, under a hickory tree, was a small wooden box. Cobb lifted the lid. Dynamite.

He ambled over to the hole and peered in. It was a real deep hole. Heaped to one side on the bottom was a smaller mound of earth, mixed with clay. True sat astride a jutting hump of rock in the center, ankle deep in fresh-dug clods, a pickaxe held loosely between his knees. Naked to the waist, he sagged forward, staring morosely at the ground, a lock of dark hair dangling over his forehead.

Cobb hunkered down on his heels. "You drop a dime?" he inquired politely.

True jumped to his feet and looked up. Then he scowled, leaned on the pickaxe and wiped his arm across his face. "Didn't hear you come up. Any fool can see I'm diggin' a well," he grunted, red-faced, as though it was an effort to speak.

Cobb regarded him sadly. Everything a man could want; enough money to burn a green stump in a pourdown, from what he'd heard, a tight-chinked cabin, a fine barn, fat stock eating off the best meadowland in the county and with the river running through it handy as you please, to boot, to say nothing of a good, strong woman like Ivy

—handsome in the bargain, with that yellow hair and all—to wash his clothes, cook his vittles, clean the fish and dress out the squirrels he'd bring home, did he ever go fishing or hunting—then hoe the garden, milk the cow and still find time to work right along with him in the fields. And now, he had to have a well, besides. Bound and determined to have all there was in the world or die trying.

Which it looked like he was about ready to do, the way he was flushed up and sweating.

"Ain't you got nothin' else to do—like sleepin'?" True snapped.

Cobb let it pass. "Was it me, I'd of had a witcher," he suggested mildly.

True gave him a filthy look. "Old man Austin witched this spot, dang him. And was it you, you'd be off fishin'. Why ain't you?"

"I done been. Caught a thirty-pound cat. I'd a brought you a chunk, if I'd knowed."

"Did, huh?" For a moment True looked almost wistful, then he whacked the pickaxe against the rock. "You're a liar. Ain't been a thirty-pound fish in that river since I was a younglin'," he stated flatly. "I've et, anyway. Ivy fetched it to me on her way to the bog. She's pickin' berries down there, today." He paused and squinted up at Cobb. "If you'd knowed what?"

"That you was fool enough to dig yourself in so deep. How you aimin' to get out?"

"Ivy's goin' to fetch the ladder when she's done berryin'." True reseated himself on the rock. "That won't be for two-three hours, though, and I'm hung on this thing. Can't do no more 'til I blast."

Cobb, clicking his tongue against his teeth, studied True thoughtfully. A fool, that's what he was; working so fast he finished two hours ahead of when he'd figured to—and then brooding because he couldn't go right on flailing. Honed fine as a skinning knife, his muscles knotted worse than a pieced-out fishline. . . . Bound and determined to kill himself.

Cobb straightened resolutely. Least he could do was lend the man a hand. After all, he was their nearest neighbor and wasn't no woman, not even Ivy, goin' to be able to run the place alone.

He fetched the dynamite. "I can haul you out with the rope, once you get it set," he said, opening the box. "You want one stick or two?" He peered over the edge inquiringly. "Now, ain't no call to act like your jaw hinges was busted."

"You been layin' out in the sun?"

"I don't hold with doin' a mule's work, if that's what you mean,"

Cobb replied with dignity, "but I set my mind to a thing, I can do it."

"Then you'd best set your mind to something that don't take muscle."

"You got legs to climb the sides with while I hold, ain't you?"

True considered. "Yep, I could —," he said slowly, visibly wavering. Then, "Why you offerin'? Tain't like you."

Cobb shrugged. "Neighborly thing to do, ain't it? Help a friend?"

"Tell you what." True stood up. "Let's give it a try first, just to make sure."

Cobb hesitated. Then he untied the bucket and let down the rope. Gripping his end of it tightly with both hands, he dug in his heels. "Ready."

True grabbed hold and climbed.

"By golly, I didn't think you had it in you." He was actually grinning as he scrambled over the edge. "All right, let me down again. No sense wastin' time."

Cobb thought one stick should do it, but True said to put two in the bucket.

Cobb lowered it carefully, pulled up the empty bucket, took it off and let the rope down once more.

True whistled softly as he wedged the dynamite into a crevice under a projecting point of the

rock. "Let's make tracks for your place when we get done here," he slanted an oblique glance upward. "Somethin' I want to talk over with you."

Figures it's a good time to try and deal me out of my place, Cobb thought. *That's gratitude for you.*

True lit the fuse.

"Now!" He grabbed the rope.

Cobb dropped his end of it into the hole and ran.

"Hey!" True's shout, though somewhat muffled, reached him clearly enough. It was a mixture of surprise, rage and anguish.

Cobb looked back over his shoulder. Fingers appeared, clawed briefly at the edge of the pit, then vanished as it crumbled. He felt a swift stab of admiration.

For a man in True's shape, that was a mighty fine jump, he thought. *Must have been close to three feet, straight up.*

He'd reached the stake which marked the line between his place and True's, when the blast came, shattering the quiet of the valley. Throwing himself flat, he lay panting. When he heard Luke's and Billy Bod's voices as they came hurrying around the river bend and Ivy calling, "True?" as she approached on the run from the bog below the hill, he rose, drew a deep, sustaining breath and reversed his direction.

They all came together at the well in a dead heat.

"True!" Ivy stared at the arm protruding from the debris. "He caved in the well," she said, stupidly.

"What was he doin' in a well?" Luke demanded.

"Never mind that. We got to get him out." Billy Bod dropped to his knees and started scrabbling at the rubble.

Cobb touched Ivy's shoulder. "Come away," he said softly. "It ain't fittin' you should see."

"Is he dead?" she whispered.

"Looks as though." Cobb pitched his voice to the proper tone of tender condolence.

By some miracle, however, True was still alive when he was dug out. By then, quite a crowd had gathered. As the word was passed, Cobb gulped and paled, but it went unnoticed. Everyone was gaping at True.

"Look! He's openin' his eyes. He's tryin' to say somethin'," Billy Bod breathed.

The women, who'd taken charge of Ivy, led her forward.

"Cobb—" True gurgled. "Cobb—" his eyes closed.

Cobb somehow got hold of himself and rose to the emergency. "Stand back, everybody," he said

importantly. "He wants a last word with *me*."

The women pulled Ivy back; the men retired to a respectful distance.

Removing his hat reverently, Cobb knelt beside True and leaned down so close their noses almost touched. Under cover of the hat, he placed his thumb on True's larynx. "Yes, old friend?" he asked, tenderly.

True's lids fluttered. "Why?" he whispered. His eyes opened.

Cobb gazed back at him silently.

True raised a mangled hand and pawed the air. "She'll fix you," he wheezed in Cobb's ear. "You ain't goin' to get away with—"

Cobb clamped down his thumb, under cover of his hat. "Yes, sir," he turned his head and looked at Ivy, nodded solmenly, "I sure will. You have my word on it, old friend."

True gave a final gurgle and lay still.

Cobb lifted his thumb and rose, noting with satisfaction the dumb-struck look on the faces of those present.

It had worked out better, all the way, than if he'd contrived the whole thing ahead of time, he reflected, bowing his head, his hat pressed to his heart in an attitude of silent tribute. Just proved that when a man planned on big things

long enough, he was primed to take hold quick on whatever Dame Chance offered when she knocked, finally. No hill woman was going to disrespect her man's deathbed wish, made before witnesses. Duty-bound, that's what she was. Wasn't going to be any might-have-been rivals come calling, neither. Not that he'd have had to fret; Ivy was lucky to get him—but this way . . .

He lifted his head, replaced his hat and threw back his shoulders. Walking across to Ivy, he said, with quiet authority: "I'll take you home, now, Ivy."

She went with him obediently, as one in a trance.

Even in a community where men of enterprise were a rarity, Cobb had easily been the most shiftless, and some of the others openly averred in his presence that the blast had scrambled True's brains, while others held that, "No, sir, must be more to old Cobb here than we figured."

Cobb bore his place in the limelight with becoming modesty. "I look on it as a sacred trust," he declared solemnly.

Out of respect for the late departed, he was spared the rigors of square dancing and his sessions on a straight-backed chair were limited to a circumspect half hour,

twice weekly. At these times, Ivy pieced quilt blocks and said little. In fact, Cobb decided, he'd seen cows with more sparkle than she showed, but he was well-enough pleased with her. She was kind of clod-pated, even for a woman, but she smiled a lot and was easy to look at with those big, brown eyes and shimmer-shiny hair. And if she was dumb, she was also easy on the earpans. Wasn't anything in this world more wearying than a lot of witless gibble-gabble.

Everybody came to the wedding.

Although Ivy stood a head taller than he, Cobb felt they made a handsome couple as they spoke their vows; he, freshly shaved and wearing a new blue suit—bought on his lately acquired credit—his hair slicked down and his shoes polished as two apples at the fair . . . Ivy in a rose-sprigged dress which set off her fine figure, her hair brushed into curls on her neck.

That night, Cobb drifted off to sleep in the tight-chinked cabin; snug in a soft bed covered by a hand-sewn quilt, lulled by the sound of one of his calves bawling for its mother down in the meadow and by Ivy's long, yellow hair, tumbled on the pillow beside him, tickling his ear.

The next morning, after a good

breakfast—the grits were hot, the side meat crisp—he rose from the table, stretched and said, "That was a mighty fine meal, Ivy. Guess I'll go huntin'. Might get us a mess of squirrel meat."

Ivy pushed back her hair and smiled. "I had it in mind maybe you'd want to chop sprouts off your—I mean, our—bottomland."

Cobb stared at her as though she'd suggested it was a good day to burn down the barn.

"Woman, fetch me my gun," he commanded.

Ivy fetched the gun and whacked him over the head.

When he came to, she was tying on her sunbonnet.

She smiled at him, gently, kindly—and handed him the axe.

He spent the next three months clearing sprouts off his bottomland and rocks from his hillside. Then, he tore down the rickety cabin where he had lived a full and care-free life—dreaming his dreams and fishing when he wanted to—hailed the best of the boards and logs over to the barn and built a lean-to shelter shed, cutting the rest for firewood. That done, he fenced his land on three sides, making the two places one.

He honed down fine as a skinning knife and his meager muscles became knotty as a pieced-out fishline.

Ivy worked right alongside of him and after his one try at sneaking away in the night, he gave up. She was not only bigger and stronger than he, she was rabbit-eared. And although she wasn't much for talking, she was a tornado when it came to action.

He lived in terror that someone might learn that when his woman said, "Frog," he jumped. Or that he might be caught helping with the milking and hoeing.

Then Ivy set him to digging out the well. When he'd dug so deep he couldn't climb out, she left him, finally, to work alone.

"I'll fetch the ladder, come chore time," she told him with that wide-eyed, placid smile.

Cobb sat down on the bottom and thought about True. *Figured to hide at my place 'till dark, likely, and be long gone by the time she got this dug out and found he wasn't in it. He sighed. She's the devil's daughter, though, and would a run him down, sure. I done him a favor, at that.*

"What you doin'?" a voice inquired.

Cobb jumped to his feet. "Oh, it's

you." He squinted up at Billy Bod Shaker.

"I was fishin' and heard you whackin' and—"

"Look, Billy Bod," Cobb said eagerly, "flag into the settlement and tell the sheriff to come get me will you?"

"Billy Bod blinked. "What for?"

"I want to give myself up for killin' True Bingham!"

It could have been purely restful in jail if it hadn't been for the keeper, who treated him like a hound dog too lacking to know the difference between a fox and a skunk.

Cobb was ready to go when the time came.

The sheriff asked if he had any last words.

Cobb looked at Ivy standing straight and tall in the front row, her yellow hair gleaming in the sun. She was smiling at the jail-keeper, who was staring at her admiringly.

Cobb shook his head.

He was smiling as they slipped the noose around his neck.



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Memory, we all know, is a sometime thing. When the moon is right, for example, a man may remember what he ate for breakfast on Whitsunday forty years ago, and yet not remember the color of his wife's eyes. Total recall may be exercised, or total oblivion, according to the individual . . .

I HAVE total amnesia," I said.

"If you had total amnesia, you would not remember how to talk or walk."

"Very well," I said. "I have qualified amnesia."

For a psychiatrist, he was remarkably restless. Dr. Brenner paced back and forth. "Look. Don't you *want* to find out who you are?"

"No."

He still regarded that attitude as distressing. "But *everybody* wants to know who he is."

"Not those of us with true amnesia."

He pointed a rather angry finger. "It's my personal opinion that in cases of amnesia, nine out of ten of the supposed victims are simply liars."

"You're losing your temper again."

He glowered at his cigarette.

"This morning at two o'clock, a police officer found you on the Lincoln Avenue Bridge looking dazed and staring at the water. What were you doing there?"

"I suspect that I had been about to jump off."

"Why?"

"I don't know and I don't want to find out. Evidently, I had the choice of jumping off that bridge or losing my memory. I preferred to lose my memory."

Brenner took a deep breath. "And when the officer asked you your name, you said you didn't know."

I conceded that.

"He then asked to see your wallet. What did you do?"

"I took it out of my pocket and tossed it into the river."

"Why?"

"Obviously I did not want to find out who I was."

MEMORY

My oldest memory was that of standing on a bridge, staring down at the murky greenish water and wondering uneasily why I was there. But I had a strong suspicion.

I did not consciously realize that I did not know who I was until the very moment the policeman asked me my name. And tossing away the wallet had been an instinctive spontaneous action. It was not until later—after my physical examination and the elimination of the possibility of physical injury—that I actually arrived at my present viewpoint. When a man loses his memory because of some emotional shock, he has, in essence, volunteered. He was not drafted.

"Perhaps you have a family? Children?"

"No children," I said. I wondered how I was so certain of that.

"Some day you'll regain your memory."

"Not if I resist." I tried to be patient with him. "We admit that there are two types of true amnesia—the one induced by physical injury and the other as the result of an emotional shock. You have examined my skull and discovered that it is uniformly convex. I did not strike my head. Therefore I suffer from an amnesia caused by unbearable emotional stress."

"You've got to face whatever it

was which caused the amnesia."

"Why?"

He waved a hand. "Well . . . it's the mature thing to do."

"Inflicting pain upon one's self is masochism, not maturity. If I remember and face my problem, what guarantee is there that I will not promptly return to the bridge and complete my original mission?"

He rubbed the back of his neck. "All right. Then what *do* you intend to do?"

"As soon as you release me—and I demand that immediately—I intend to leave this vicinity behind. Preferably by a thousand miles. I want no contact with anyone who might restore my memory."

"How do you think you can travel? You have no money."

That was a painful point and I would have to give it some thought.

The phone on his desk rang and he picked it up. After a moment of listening, he smiled. "Darwin? Send him right in."

"Who is that?" I asked suspiciously.

Brenner's smile achieved smugness. "You'll find out."

The man who entered was in his fifties and wore a Spaniel concern on his face. "Oswald! So it is you. I *thought* I recognized the

description the police gave me.”

Oswald? What a revolting name. I could not resist asking, “Is that my first or last name?”

“Your first. Your last is—”

“Never mind,” I said quickly. “I don’t want to know.”

“We found a scrap of paper with Mr. Darwin’s address in your top-coat pocket,” Dr. Brenner said. “We informed him of your situation and asked him to come over. We thought he might perhaps be able to identify you.”

“This is Oswald Harrison,” Darwin said. “I’m his lawyer and investment counselor.”

Investment counselor? I determined to try one delicate probe into the past. “Do I have money?”

“Of course, Oswald. You’re worth over a million.”

“I really *do* have that much? I mean I haven’t been embezzled or robbed recently? Very recently?”

“Of course not, Oswald.”

I decided to probe no further.

“I’ll take him home,” Darwin said. “I’ll see that he has the best of care, the best of doctors.”

“I don’t want to go home and I don’t want the best of doctors,” I said firmly. “I simply want to cash a check and leave this city. I’ll let you know where to send any future dividends or the like in the future.”

Darwin cleared his throat. “Os-

wald, are you *really* suffering from amnesia?”

“Of course. Do you have a blank check I can use? I think five thousand dollars should suffice me for the present.”

Darwin looked uncomfortable. “I have your power of attorney. I’m afraid that I’d have to stop payment on any check you might choose to write now, Oswald.”

I glared at him. “Why?”

“I’d only be doing it to protect you from yourself, Oswald. If you actually *have* amnesia, then for legal purposes you’re—ah—mentally incompetent.”

I’m afraid I raised my voice considerably. “Mentally incompetent? Darwin, you’re fired.”

“Now, now,” he said soothingly. “In your present condition you can’t fire me either.”

I looked at Dr. Brenner. He seemed to be enjoying this.

“I don’t know the exact procedure,” Darwin said. “But I believe that the court will appoint me as your guardian until such time as you recover your memory or are proven mentally and emotionally responsible.”

I was faced with an impossible dilemma. On the one hand, I had a protective amnesia which I cherished; on the other, I had a million dollars I couldn’t touch until I regained my memory.

Should I put a hand to my forehead and wince as though I felt a stab of pain? Should I suddenly mutter that my memory was coming back?

No, that seemed a bit too obvious. Perhaps Darwin might believe me—his face indicated a certain simpleness—but Dr. Brenner would not.

As a matter of fact, his raised eyebrows indicated that he expected me to try something of that nature and was joyously waiting to crush the attempt.

"Just how much do you remember, Oswald?" Darwin asked.

"Nothing," I said truthfully and reluctantly.

Darwin nodded solemnly. "You need rest, Oswald. After a shock like this, I recommend that you go back home and rest for a few days. I'm sure that Francis can take charge of everything and see that you're comfortable."

Who the devil was Francis? My wife? My cook? "Who is she?"

"He's your valet," Darwin regarded me thoughtfully. "I believe I'll put in that stop order at your bank as soon as I've taken you home."

If my property had been worth only fifty thousand or so, I believe I might cheerfully have chucked it all and departed. But after all, a million is a million.

Could I learn a few facts about myself—enough to convince Darwin that I had regained my memory—and yet not enough to disturb my actual amnesia? I did not want to find myself back on that bridge, but there *was* the money to consider. I sighed. "Very well, Darwin. Let's go home."

Darwin drove me along the western shore of the lake to the suburbs. Eventually, we turned into a long driveway that terminated in a circle before an imposing three-storied Colonial.

Darwin escorted me past the butler and into the large living room. Another servant was sorting some cellophane-wrapped suits which had evidently just arrived from the cleaners. His eyes flickered slightly when he saw me.

I took the obvious guess. "Good morning, Francis."

"Good morning, sir."

Darwin was pleased. "You recognized him, Oswald."

"Of course," I said matter-of-factly.

Darwin spoke to Francis. "Mr. Harrison has lost his memory. Or most of it."

I wandered about the room recognizing the paintings as original Pissarros and Morisots. Evidently, my amnesia did not extend to the recognition of art.

Darwin whispered to Francis in

a corner, undoubtedly conveying more information about me to the valet.

A single framed photograph on a corner shelf caught my eye. The woman portrayed had a firm jaw and penetrating eyes.

Good heavens, did I have a wife? And her?

I moved closer and was considerably relieved when I read the unadorned inscription, *Your Sister, Violet.*

In the fireplace I noticed what appeared to be the charred remains of several picture frames.

Darwin stopped whispering to Francis and evidently decided to test my memory. He pointed to the photograph. "Who is that?"

"My sister. I'd recognize her anywhere."

He was impressed. "And Beverly. Do you know who Beverly is?"

There are men named Beverly, but I decided to play the odds: "Of course I know who Beverly is. I've known her for years."

Darwin wasn't convinced. "She's your wife." He buttoned his coat. "Well, I'll be running along. I'll see that your affairs are kept in order until you regain your memory."

"Where is my wife?" I asked.

"I really don't know," Darwin said. "Possibly she's gone out shopping."

Francis appeared about to say something, but he checked himself.

When Darwin was gone, I explored the house further. It appeared that Beverly and I had separate bedrooms—which explained why she had not missed me and had chosen to go shopping.

I could not find a photograph of her.

Why did I have a photograph of my sister in the living room and none of my wife?

I went downstairs and made myself a drink.

At eleven, the front doorbell chimed and in a few moments my sister Violet strode into the room.

From the cut of her clothes, I had the distinct impression that she rode horses and divided the year into gymkhanas. She took off her coat, but not her hat, and that told me that she did not live in my house.

"Well, well, Oswald," she said. "Darwin tells me you've lost your memory again."

I frowned. "Again?"

She went to the sideboard and mixed herself a whiskey and soda. "Of course you don't remember now, do you? But it's ancient family history. You were twenty-one when it happened the last time."

I hesitated before asking, "Was

there any—particular—reason why it happened?"

She studied me over her glass for a moment. "You have always rather fancied your intelligence, haven't you?"

"My dear sister, when a man who is six feet tall is asked what his height is, he does not stoop and coyly lisp that he is merely five feet two."

She smiled faintly. "On your twenty-first birthday, father gave you fifty thousand dollars. He wanted to see what you could do with it in one year's time."

"Well?"

"You promptly invested all of it in the firm a classmate of yours was forming."

"It went broke?" I asked uneasily.

She laughed. "You were completely taken in. There *was* no firm. Your friend simply skipped to South America with every cent of your money."

I did not, did *not* remember the incident. But I was perspiring.

"You didn't regain your memory for six months. According to the psychiatrist whom father retained, there is one thing in this world you simply cannot bear. And that is being made a fool of. You chose to forget who you were, rather than face the fact that you had been made ridiculous."

"Nonsense," I snapped.

She put down her glass. "Where's Beverly?"

"I don't know." I cleared my throat. "How do Beverly and I get along?"

"Quite evenly. I don't believe you're ever had an argument."

Something had been vaguely bothering me. "How old is she?"

Violet smiled. "Twenty-three."

I knew Violet was waiting for the next question. "And how old am I?"

"Fifty-two."

"I see," I said dryly.

Violet retained her smile. "She married you for your money, of course, Oswald. But don't let that bother you now. You were always quite aware of that and chose to accept the situation."

"I was in love with her?"

Violet laughed. "Of course not. Beverly is merely another one of your possessions and appreciated in the same manner. You are willing to pay generously for the things you want and that is to your credit. But when you do acquire a possession, it becomes inflexibly yours. You will not part with it for anything."

I noticed a shadow at the doorway and recognized the profile. "Francis," I said sharply. "Have you nothing to do but eavesdrop?"

The shadow disappeared.

I turned back to Violet. "When did I acquire him?"

"He's been with you the last ten years and I believe he's hated every minute of it. You browbeat him unmercifully."

"Then why doesn't he leave?"

"You do pay him rather well. Perhaps you have to. You've never been able to keep any other man for more than a year."

After Violet left, Francis approached me. He seemed frightened, yet urged forward by a pipe-stem of determination. "Is it true that you have amnesia, sir? That you can't remember anything?"

"Is that any business of yours?"

He nodded nervously. "Yes, sir. Because I'd like the fifty thousand dollars."

"What fifty thousand dollars?"

"The fifty thousand you promised me for not going to the police, sir."

I glared incredulously. "Why should I promise you fifty thousand dollars not to go to the police?"

He swallowed. "Don't you remember, sir? Last night you murdered your wife."

I stared at him.

He seemed to gain confidence. "You and your wife had a quarrel last night, sir. About ten-thirty, it was. I don't know what you were arguing about, but just as I en-

tered the room with a tray of sandwiches, you picked up a poker and struck her over the head. You killed her instantly, sir."

I found that I had to sit down.

Francis went on. "We put her body in the station wagon and drove into the country, sir. We buried her in a grove of trees. I'm positive no one will ever find her."

I think I absorbed all this fairly well. Was the death of my wife the reason I had amnesia? And yet, now that I had been told that I had killed her, why didn't my memory return? Was it because I didn't want to know *why* I had committed the murder?

"The fifty thousand dollars, sir," Francis said again.

"You won't get a cent."

Color crept to his cheekbones. "Then I will be forced to let the police know."

"Have you ever considered the fact that you are an accessory?"

He smiled slyly. "I will not go to the police, personally. I will merely send them an anonymous note telling them where to find the body of your wife. If you attempt to implicate me, I will deny everything. It will be your word against mine and I think you have much more to lose than I."

If only I could *remember* where we had buried Beverly, I could re-

move her body and bury it some place else. But obviously Francis wasn't going to tell me now.

It was apparent that I would have to meet his demand, but there was an obstacle to overcome before I could do that. "I can't give you the fifty thousand dollars now. Darwin has seen to it that I can't touch a cent of my money until I've recovered my memory."

He must have thought I was lying. "I'm going to send the note to the police," he said stubbornly.

"Francis, you've been with me ten years, haven't you?"

He nodded warily, perhaps wondering whether I was about to appeal to his sympathy.

"Then as a man's man, I assume that you know just as much about me and my acquaintances as I do—did?"

"Perhaps."

"Very well. Then we're going to sit down and you're going to tell me everything you know about me—about my friends, my enemies, about my interests, my activities."

He still didn't understand why.

"Don't you see," I said impatiently. "We're going to make it *appear* that I've recovered my memory. When we've done that, I'll be able to draw out the fifty thousand dollars and hand it over to you."

His eyes brightened momentarily and then became uncertain again.

I thought I knew what was in his mind. Suppose I actually *did* recover my memory and did so without telling him. I could secretly disinter Beverly's body and bury it some place else. That would leave him with little or no actual hold over me.

"Francis," I said, and tried to make the words reassuring, "the doctor at police headquarters informed me privately that my specific type of amnesia is cured only by time. And he estimated that this time would be almost a year. We're just going to make it *seem* as though I had recovered my memory. And we ought to be able to do that within a week or two."

My lies cheered him considerably.

He would not have been so sanguine had he known what was inevitably in store for him. Obviously, I could not allow him to blackmail me forever—and that is the habit of blackmailers. I would have to get rid of him permanently and I would have to do the job myself. I would have done it at this moment perhaps, but I did need him to regain control of my estate.

Francis and I set about our task systematically. We collected all the

photographs in the house. Finding any of my wife proved difficult, but eventually I discovered several in the drawer of her vanity table.

She was exquisite—even in the candid snapshots. Beautiful—and yet, remote. Cool.

Francis and I went through our pile of snapshots and he identified the various individuals and gave me whatever information he possessed about them. Nothing, however, brought back any authentic recollection. I learned many facts concerning myself and my life through study and rote.

Darwin and Violet dropped in every day. And when they inquired about my wife, I fabricated the story that she had decided on a sudden visit to a dear friend in California. After a few weeks, I would go to the police and report her missing, but I did not want them delving about at the present time.

After slightly more than a week with Francis, I felt qualified to surprise Darwin with the bald statement that I had completely recovered my memory.

Darwin had done such a thorough job of protecting my money from me, that I found it obligatory to appear before a court-appointed committee of doctors and endure some one hundred and thirty ques-

tions Darwin had compiled, to insure that I was truly familiar with my past.

There were, naturally, some questions which Francis and I had not foreseen, but an allowance was made for a normal decline of memory through the passage of years.

After the interview, three more days dragged by before the legal tangle was removed and I was once again reunited with my money.

When Darwin phoned me the happy news, I immediately gave all the servants—with the exception of Francis—the afternoon and evening off. When they were gone, I rang for Francis.

"Well, Francis, how would you like your money? Cash, I suppose?"

His eyes glittered with anticipation. "Cash, sir. And small bills, if you please."

I nodded. "Very well. I'll drive to the bank in a few moments."

I went to the sideboard and kept the glass I intended for Francis blocked by my back. It already contained the white powder. I added whiskey and sweet soda to cover any possible bitterness and brought back his glass and mine. "We'll have a drink on our success."

"I don't drink, sir."

"Nonsense. My estate has been

returned to me and you are about to possess fifty thousand dollars. Surely that's worth a drink of celebration. And sit down, man."

I was not concerned with his comfort, but I did prefer that he should be sitting when he felt the effects of the drink.

He took his glass and enjoyed the pleasure of sitting down in the presence of his employer. I prompted conversation for approximately ten minutes before he began to nod.

It was another ten minutes before Francis was quite dead.

After some difficulty, I succeeded in hefting Francis over one shoulder and carrying him along the concealing line of trees to the garage. I deposited him in the bed of the station wagon and covered his body with a tarpaulin.

I added a shovel and a pick to the load and then removed my outer clothing and slipped into a pair of greasy coveralls I found on a wall peg.

Francis and I had evidently buried Beverly in the night, and apparently one of us had held the flashlight while the other dug. But I was alone now and it seemed much more practical to dig the grave for Francis during the daylight. I was quite certain that after an hour or two of driving, I would find some place sufficiently untraveled for me to park the car

and select a suitable burial site.

I drove down Capitol to Sixth and turned north on Highway 42. The traffic was mild and I passed through several small near-city towns before I began considering a turn into one of the graveled side roads.

However, none of them appeared to lead to sufficient isolation and I continued on to Medlow.

At the right turn just outside of that village, the traffic in front of me came to a halt and I was forced to stop.

I craned my head out of the window. Six or seven cars were halted in front of me and a state patrol car was parked on the shoulder of the road.

I experienced a momentary panic, until I realized that this was merely a routine highway safety check. The officer would simply ascertain that my horn, my headlights, and my tail lights were in working order and affix an inspection sticker on my windshield. I would be on my way in a few minutes.

I glanced at the rear of the station wagon. The stiffness of the tarpaulin concealed any suspicious outlines and Francis was thoroughly covered.

I relaxed and gradually edged my car forward until it was my turn for the inspection.

The officer found my lights and horn satisfactory and he came back to the driver's window. "Your driver's license, please."

My driver's license! But that had been in the wallet I'd thrown over the bridge!

I made a pretense of going through my pockets and then smiled weakly as I said, "I'm afraid I left my wallet home, officer."

He regarded me for a moment and then went to the front of my car. He returned immediately. "You wouldn't happen to remember your license number, would you?"

My smile was still apologetic. "I really don't have a head for numbers."

And he smiled, too, but it was a thin smile. "Your license number happens to be AA 100. I kind of think you'd remember it—if this is your car."

He looked the shining exterior of the station wagon over once more and then his eyes returned to me. "What do you do for a living?"

"I have an independent income."

He chuckled softly and I knew he was thinking of the grimy coveralls I wore.

"Look, officer," I said. "If you'll just phone—" I suddenly realized that I didn't remember Darwin's

first name. "If you'll just phone my investment counselor," I continued swiftly, "he'll be able to identify me. We've known each other for twenty years. His name is Darwin."

Perhaps the officer was impressed by the term "investment counselor." A common auto thief is hardly likely to cite one of them as a reference.

He gave my suggestion a moment's thought and then said, "All right, we might give it a try. What's this Darwin's number?"

And I didn't know!

Francis and I had spent a week of hard work together, but there are so many details one can overlook—so many inconsequential little things that suddenly become important—a license number, a first name, a phone number.

I found myself perspiring. "I don't recall the number but surely you can look it up."

The officer's eyes narrowed. "You've known him for twenty years, but you don't know his phone number?" He opened the car door. "That was a nice bluff, mister, but now move over, I'll do the driving."

The three men in the room with me were detectives and the large one who said he was Newell be-

gan the interminable questioning:
"Why did you kill him?"

"I have nothing to say until I see my lawyer. Get me Darwin."

"We let you look up his number and phone his office. There was no answer."

"It's after five. He's probably home."

"But you don't know his home phone number, or his address, or even his first name. And there are twenty-six Darwins in the city directory and another dozen scattered in the suburbs."

"Well, try them all," I snapped.

Newell sighed and nodded to one of the other detectives. He left the room.

Newell lit a cigarette. "You do admit that you can identify the body in your station wagon?"

There was no point in denying that. "Yes. He was my valet."

"What's his last name?"

"I don't *know* his last name. I never addressed him as anything but Francis." How could Francis and I have overlooked anything so elementary?

Newell puffed at his cigarette. "Could you tell us why we found a letter and envelope addressed to you in one of this Francis' pockets?"

"What letter?"

He took an envelope out of his pocket, laid it down on the desk.

I stared at it and then I began to tremble.

I had *not* killed my wife.

I remembered. Everything. Everything.

She was alive and soon would be with that miserable . . .

I didn't have to pick up the letter. Every word was a remembered stab.

Dear Oswald:

I married you for your money and you married me because I was something nice to own. When we arrived at our tacit agreement, I could foresee no possibility that I should ever have to break it.

I have always regarded myself as somewhat cold-blooded. Perhaps I even took pride in this. But having money alone did not prove enough. I am a woman and I discovered, somewhat to my surprise—that I needed affection. Love.

Do you remember Roger Ferris? I believe you and he belong to several of the same clubs.

He does not have the wealth you do, Oswald, but I'm sure we will find it comfortably sufficient.

I am establishing residence outside of the state and of course there will be no question of a property settlement. I simply want my freedom.

I have told no one, except Roger, about this, and I leave it to you to explain matters to your friends.

You may devise anything you wish. I will not deny it.

Beverly

Roger Ferris! That vapid . . .

I had read that letter at home and then had raged through the house snatching every photograph, every portrait, of Beverly. And I had cursed and watched them burn in the fireplace.

Roger Ferris!

What could I tell my friends?

At the club. . . .

They would remember that I had played cards with Ferris often. And suspected nothing.

They would whisper . . . whisper. They would point after I passed by.

They would *laugh!*

I could *not* be laughed at.

And now I remembered that I had left the house and walked until I reached the bridge. The water below had been cold and harsh. It repelled—and it invited. I had closed my eyes. *What* could I do?

And then the policeman had tapped me on the shoulder and I had opened my eyes to a world of

strangers. I wanted to know none of them and none of them must know me.

And now Francis!

He had found and read that letter and that vile creature had used my amnesia to blackmail me for something I had *not* done.

It was too much. Too much. To be made a fool of by a wife . . . and by a *servant!*

I closed my eyes and when a door clicked, I opened them again, feeling apprehensive.

There were three men in the room and one of them said, "I phoned about a dozen Darwins and I think I've got the right one now. He'll be here in a few minutes."

Darwin? Who was this Darwin? And what was I doing in this room?

I looked at the three men—the three men I had never seen before this very instant—and I was sure of only one thing. I wasn't going to believe anything they said.

Nothing at all.

I wasn't. I wasn't.



LORNA POWELL's knees, back, and arms hurt, and she was very, very happy. The expression on her plumpish, unlined face beneath the wide-brimmed straw hat was one of blissful-concentration. Her rheumatic twinges didn't deter the vigorous movements of the garden spade as it plunged into the overturned soil. She was thinking of tulips.

"Morning, Mrs. Powell," the mailman said, leaning over the pickets. "Still at it, huh?"

"Still at it, Mr. Forbes," Lorna said cheerfully. "Did you see the way my petunias are coming up? It's all this nice sun we've been having."

"You sure worked a miracle," Mr. Forbes chuckled. "That Wally Birch, used to own this house, all he ever planted was trash. Made the place a regular junk yard. Bet you found a heap of it."

"Yes, all sorts of things," Lorna smiled tolerantly. "I haven't seen Mr. Birch since the closing. I understand he's living somewhere in town."

The mailman grunted. "Yeah. At



Keely's Bar or the jailhouse, that's where he's living. It's sure nice having you on my route instead, Mrs. Powell. I really mean that."

"Why thank you," Lorna said.

When the mailman left, she took a momentary breather and then renewed her efforts more energetically than ever. She had fertilized it, but the soil could have been richer; years of neglect and the adulteration of trash had weakened it. There were still old tin cans, newspaper scraps, rusty nails and assorted rubbish under the surface, and the inevitable rocks that clanged against the spade. One clanged now, and she clucked and struggled to remove it.

It was a strangely white rock. She loosened the earth around it,

I never did care for that kiddie story of Mrs. Wiggs, or was it Higgs, in the Cabbage Patch! Our heroine is much more my style . . . her spade uncovers lovely, earthy things! Cabbages, pooh! Who wants cabbages when they can have evidence?



and it came free. She rose as she picked it up and looked at its peculiar contours, into the empty sockets where human eyes would have once looked back.

It was a skull.

Lorna dropped it. It rolled grotesquely and she muffled a shriek. Then, after a moment's consideration, she did the only sensible thing. She bent over and picked up the horrible object in her gloved hands. With her eyes screwed half-shut, she bore it to-

wards the cardboard trash box and dropped it in.

But now she was too shaken to continue with her spading. She gave her garden one last forlorn look and went inside the house for a bracer of tea.

That afternoon, Lorna stopped in at Heather's Gift Shoppe in the village. Heather was an ardent gardener too, but Lorna had something besides seedlings and tulip bulbs on her mind. She approached the counter, and Heather, a gangling spinster with large spectacles over her bright eyes, smiled warmly. "Hello, Lorna dear," she said. "How's the garden?"

"Oh, fine, I guess," Lorna said vaguely, looking idly at some pewter mugs.

"You don't sound very enthusiastic. Your back again?"

"Oh, I'm used to that." She looked sideways at the store's only other customer, and lowered her voice. "Heather, didn't you once start to tell me something about Mr. Birch? You know, the man I bought the house from?"

Heather frowned. "Birch! Mmph. I could tell you plenty about him, but you never seemed very interested. Don't know what's the matter with you, Lorna, half the fun of living in a town like this

is gossippin'." She chuckled and added, "What do you want to know?"

"Well, I remember you said something about his wife—"

"Wife's dead," Heather said flatly. "Took a rowboat out on the lake early one morning and the boat came back empty. You know that, don't you?"

"I know he became a widower last year. I suppose that's why he decided to sell his place."

"The only thing is, they never found his wife's body. Lake's too deep, so they say. Anyhow, they dragged it for a couple of days, and then gave up."

"Is that when—" Lorna paused delicately. "Is that when Mr. Birch began drinking?"

"Him?" Heather laughed loudly. "Wally Birch never needed any excuse for *that*. He drank plenty when his wife was alive, too. It's a wonder anybody hires him anymore."

"What does he do?"

"General handyman, when he's working. I had him put up some shelves for me once, and he did a pretty fair job. But the place smelled like a distillery for a month." She squinted at Lorna. "Say, why're you so interested all of a sudden? He hasn't been bothering you, has he?"

"No, no," Lorna said quickly. "I

haven't seen him in months. I was just—curious."

"Well, if you want to know anything else, you just ask Pauley at the grocery. He knows everything about the folks in this town. And they say *women* gossip! What do you think of those mugs, Lorna? They're only a dollar and a half and they're real pewter."

Mr. Pauley turned from the glass doors of the refrigerator case, his distended cheeks working a slice of ham.

"Haven't seen you in days, Mrs. Powell. They tell me you're turning that garden of yours into a real showplace."

"I've been working at it," Lorna smiled. "Oh, I guess I'll need some more tea, Mr. Pauley. By the way," she said lightly as he went to the shelves, "a friend of mine was just talking to me about the Birches. Customers of yours, weren't they?"

"Off and on. Off when they didn't pay their bills, which happened every few months like clockwork."

"Pity about Mrs. Birch, wasn't it? Her going like that must have shattered the poor man—"

"Wally shattered?" The grocer laughed. "He was tickled silly to be rid of her. Why, those two fought worse than a couple of

hounds over a bone. Every other night she used to throw out one of his smelly pipes, and him after it." He slapped the tea carton on the counter: "Don't you worry about Wally. He's been celebrating ever since she died."

"It was such a—strange sort of death, wasn't it?"

"Some people don't think so," Mr. Pauley said, leaning conspiratorially towards her. "Some people—and I ain't sayin' I'm one of 'em, Wally Birch is a friend of mine—some people think it wasn't accidental. That Wally had a hand in it."

"Heavens!" Lorna gasped. "You don't mean murder?"

"Some people think like that," Mr. Pauley said gravely.

Lorna left the grocery almost in a state of shock. Could Wally Birch's hatred of his wife account for the extra dash of color in her tulips, the unusual liveliness in the petunias? It was a horrible thought, and she exchanged it for a more sensible line of reasoning. Couldn't the skull be an Indian relic, a fossil of a long-forgotten time? Why jump to conclusions, and have the police swarm all over her garden with pick and shovel, hacking her season's work to pieces, ruining her chances for the flower show?

Back at the house, she donned

her work gloves and, shuddering, retrieved the skull from the trash-box. The wise thing to do was to put the skull in the broom closet, and wait for a more opportune moment before presenting it to the police. Gingerly, with averted eyes, she placed it at the bottom of a pail, covered it with soiled rags, and then went to the living room to relax by reading her seed catalogue.

When the knocking started a few minutes later, she was so startled she dropped the catalogue.

She opened the door, and stood facing the grimy, unshaven face, the brutal jaw, the hulking shoulders of Wally Birch. He wore paint-stained, greasy coveralls, and was puffing vigorously on a dirty old pipe.

"I want to talk to you," he growled.

"Why—why—"

"Can I come in or can't I?"

She stood aside, and he stomped in, leaving muddy footprints on her carpet. A cloud of smoke billowed from his pipe, and the smell was almost more than Lorna could bear.

"I hear you're askin' questions around town," he said. "What for? You bought this house at a darned good price. That don't allow you to get nosy."

"That's not so, Mr. Birch. If

there's anyone in this town who minds her own business, it's me."

"Well, keep on minding it and leave me alone! Any questions you got, you ask *me*."

"There's no reason to be unpleasant. I learned about your—tragedy for the first time today, so naturally I was curious. Why shouldn't I be?"

He came close to her, bringing the foul stench of tobacco and whiskey with him. "Listen, lady. There could be a worse tragedy if you keep on poking around. I'm telling you for once and for all to let sleeping dogs lie! I had enough trouble with women!"

"Really, Mr. Birch!" She was aghast.

He brought up a hamlike fist and thrust it under her nose. "I'll fix you if you don't, hear me? I'll fix you good!"

He turned and stalked out, leaving her gasping.

When she caught her breath, the first thing Lorna did was open the windows, her heart still palpitating. The second was to call Letitia Daley and ask her advice. Letitia was a member of the garden club, and her brother was the sheriff. Letitia wasn't at home, but the call decided her anyway. She donned her best straw hat and leather gloves and sallied forth to put Wally Birch behind the town's

strongest set of iron bars, for good.

Sheriff Daley was a small man, with friendly blue eyes and a shiny dome sprinkled lightly with blond hair. Lorna faced him across his cluttered desk, and got right to the point.

"Isn't it true," she said, "that lots of folks think Wally Birch killed his wife?"

Daley frowned. "You're looking at one of them right now, Mrs. Powell. That case is the biggest disappointment of my life. I *know* he had the temperament, the motive, the chance. I think he killed her, but don't ask me to prove it. Is it Wally Birch you came here about?"

"Wally Birch—and maybe proof you've always wanted."

Daley smiled incredulously. "Do you really mean that?"

"I've got proof, don't worry." She smoothed her skirt. "But for certain reasons, Sheriff, I can't tell you what it is. For a little while."

He was puzzled. "Did you find something in his house? A letter? Bloodstains?"

"I can't say for the moment."

"Can't say?" Daley echoed, with irritation. "And what am I supposed to do in the meantime, Mrs. Powell?"

"Put him away, of course."

"Are you serious, Mrs. Powell? I can't put Birch in jail with evidence I haven't got. Now if you've really found something, I insist you turn it over to me!"

"I can't do that," she said stubbornly, thinking of her delicate flowers, carefully nurtured for the flower show.

"Mrs. Powell, you're not being any help at all—"

"Well, can't you lock him up for threatening me? That's what he did, you know. This very afternoon."

"Birch threatened you? Why?"

"Because I've been asking questions, that's why. He told me I'd better stop or there'd be trouble. Can't you put him in jail for that?"

Daley sighed. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Powell, that won't do. The best thing is for you to tell me everything you know. My hands are tied otherwise."

"But he might—do me harm!"

"Then the best thing is to be honest with me!"

Lorna stood up. For a moment, she wavered between telling him and not telling him. If she told him, her garden would be ruined the following day, when they searched for the rest of Mrs. Birch's skeleton. If she didn't talk—at least until the flower show was over—

"I'm sorry, Sheriff. I didn't mean

to talk in riddles, but you know how women are sometimes. But thank you very much."

She let herself out, almost colliding with Mr. Pauley, the grocer, who was waiting in the outside office. He tipped his hat and smiled unctuously, pointing to the bag of groceries on the bench. "Just making my regular delivery to the prisoners, ma'am," he said. "Nice to see you again."

"Good day, Mr. Pauley," Lorna said stiffly.

Lorna had never feared solitude or darkness; her long widowhood had accustomed her to both. But that night, the stench of Wally Birch's tobacco still lingered in the front room, an aromatic reminder of violence and danger. She tried to overcome the smell by baking up a batch of black walnut cookies, and the stratagem worked until bedtime. But just as she was ready to turn out the lights and go upstairs, there was a pounding on the front door.

Her heart echoed the pounding as Lorna opened the door. This time, Wally Birch had forgotten the pipe, and if the overpowering reek of him was any indication, probably on the counter of a bar-room. His eyes were glazed, blood-shot and red-rimmed. He was

staggering drunk; his step into the room was a lurch, and Lorna yelped in fear.

"You ol' hag," he muttered. "You ol' busybody. Didn't I warn you to stop bothering me? Didn't I?"

She retreated into the room, too frightened to try to reason with him. "I haven't done you any harm—please leave me alone—"

"You think I'll let you get away with it? Huh?"

"Get out of here!" she commanded, quaveringly. "You get out of here, Mr. Birch. I don't want you in this house!"

"You went to the cops, didn't you?" he snorted. Then he took a giant step, swayed, and almost toppled off his feet. "You went to tell the cops about me!"

"Please go away!"

"Pauley told me," he said. "Pauley heard what you told that runt Daley. So you *found* something, huh?" He barked a laugh. "All right, let's have it—"

"It's not true. I didn't find anything!"

"Don't lie to me!" he shouted. "Give it to me or I'll bash your head in!"

He snatched something from the table to reinforce his threat; only later did Lorna realize that it was her World's Fair miniature souvenir. She hid her face, and cowered.

"Then you *did* kill her," she whimpered. "You did kill your wife—"

"And I'll kill you, too!" he belted. "I'll kill you, too, you old bat. You're just like her! Just like her!"

"Please, Mr. Birch, don't! Please, please—"

He took another lumbering step, and Lorna screamed. The response it brought surprised her more than it did Birch. The front door burst open, and Birch turned heavily to stare with stupid, blinking eyes at the uniformed figure striding into the room. There wasn't even a gun drawn; there was so much authority about the man that Birch simply lowered the brass object in his grip and shook his head slowly, a gesture of pleading and surrender.

"I didn't do nothin'," he mumbled. "Honest, I didn't do a thing . . ."

"Thank God!" Lorna sobbed, running to the officer. "Thank God you heard me—"

The officer touched her arm. "It's all right, Mrs. Powell, I been outside of your house for the last hour or so. Sheriff Daley told me to watch your place for the next couple of nights, said you might need some protection." He glared at Birch. "And I see he was right . . ."

"He killed his wife!" Lorna said,

pointing a shaky finger. "He admitted it to me. He killed her—"

"Well, he won't be bothering you any more; that's for sure." He took Birch's arm, roughly, and propelled him towards the front door. "I'll take him in and let the Sheriff handle this."

There were some clouds early the next morning, but by eight o'clock the sun broke through and streamed into the garden. Lorna got out of bed at nine-thirty and decided she had pampered herself enough. She dressed, ate a light breakfast, and went back to work among her flowers.

When Sheriff Daley's car pulled up in front of the picket fence, she looked up from her planting and brushed the hair from her eyes.

"Morning, Mrs. Powell," Daley said cheerfully. "Sorry I couldn't talk to you last night, but we were pretty busy."

She stood up. "I wanted to thank you for telling that nice officer to watch my house. Heaven knows what might have happened if—"

"Well, quite a lot happened, thanks to you." He leaned on the fence. "Wally Birch confessed last night. After all this time, we got the truth. He killed her, all right."

"How awful," Lorna said. "But I'm glad it's over . . ."

"The only thing that still puzzles me is what you found, Mrs. Powell. Just what made you so sure about the murder?"

"You won't dig up my garden if I tell you? I mean, at least until after the flower show?"

"Dig up your garden? I don't understand."

"You will," Lorna sighed. "One moment."

She went inside to the broom closet, and brought the skull to the sheriff.

"Here," she said, handing over the dreadful object. "*That's* why I was so sure, Sheriff. I found *this* in my garden yesterday."

His brow wrinkled, Daley turned it over in his hand.

"That's funny," he said. "Birch admitted to killing his wife, all right, but he said he *drowned* her."

Turning it slowly in his fingers, as though searching for something, he finally applied pressure to the cranium of the skull. It took him awhile to make a crack appear, and then the cranium swung open on a tiny hinge.

Daley reached into the bowl of the skull, and fingered the tiny dry black flakes.

"Pipe tobacco," he said. "It's just an old humidor, Mrs. Powell."

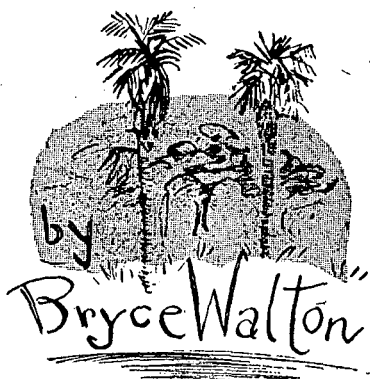


THE BRUTALLY COERCIVE event occurred Friday evening. Ralph Greene Jr., after having read, drunk, and goofed another day away in his usual manner, drove from his father's plush estate into nearby Santa Barbara to the Cock and Bull. This was an elegant dining and drinking establishment nestled among palm trees, and hiding high-class gambling facilities in the back room.

Ralph approached his nightly ritual with the serious air of someone arriving for work, for he considered stud poker, dealer's choice, as a serious vocation, and never as an obsession or a hobby. His lack of business acumen was abruptly brought home when his entrance

into the gaming room was halted, and he was escorted by a beetle-browed muscleman into the private office of Nick Mockmann, owner of the Cock and Bull.

There had been other somewhat friendly discussions with Mockmann. But the atmosphere was now chilly. And the heavy features of Mockmann, a large tanned gentleman who managed to radiate a sense of power while sprawled at ease behind a mahogany desk, were far from genial. Furthermore, the sound-proofed room gave no auditory assurance whatever of there being an outside world. It reminded Ralph uncomfortably of the interior of a burial vault. During a long, unpleasant silence,



Mockmann and his man, Charlie, studied Ralph. If their purpose was to induce exaggerated self-consciousness in Ralph, they succeeded admirably. He felt extremely inadequate and, to the extent that he could do so safely, he resented it. That is to say, he grinned outwardly while inwardly indulging in fantasies of revenge of how he would turn the tables when he finally came into his inheritance.

"Ralph, do you have the faintest idea how much you're into me for?" asked Mockmann, in an odd whisper suggesting the hiss of a lighted fuse.

"A fair amount, I suppose," said Ralph.

This is a touching tale of filial devotion and paternal love; of a son who obeyed his father's instructions, even though they led him to patricide; in short, a tale of filial obedience, after a lifetime of disobedience . . .

Mockmann frowned. "And you've persistently ignored my polite reminders? Ralph, have you no sense of honor, duty or obligation?"

"Well, I've always known that I could eventually pay."

"When, and how?"

"My father, as you know, practically owns the county, and—"

Mr. Mockmann interrupted with the incisiveness common to those who have the world in a jug and the stopper in one hand. "I understand he gives you a monthly allowance, Ralph. How much, or is that too personal?"

Ralph shifted, embarrassed. "Two," he whispered.

"Thousand?"

"Two hundred," Ralph said, through a pale wet grin of humiliation.

"That means, Ralph, that your entire allowance for the next ten years would just about cover your I.O.U.'s. I can't wait, nor can I wait until luck starts making passes at you. I'm not running a bingo barn. I try to be fair, but this country wasn't built on sentimentality."

He lowered his voice apologetically. "I regret this sort of thing, but you have no more than a week to pay up in full."

"But that's impossible!" Ralph said.

"Charlie," Mockmann said. "Would you try to encourage Ralph to take a more optimistic attitude about this situation?"

Grinning, Charlie grabbed a fistful of Ralph's blazer and performed a terrifyingly effortless weight-lifting act. He then sat Ralph in a foam-rubber chair. With consummate skill sparked with pleasure, he began giving him what Ralph incredulously realized was a "working over."

Ralph screamed until he realized no one outside the soundproofed walls could hear him. He begged. He sobbed. He flopped on his knees and pleaded for mercy and understanding.

Once he heard Mockmann say, "The old ways are sometimes the best. If repeated treatments aren't enough, Ralph, you will be encased in a concrete block and dropped somewhere. Probably in San Diego bay."

An hour later, it seemed incredible to Ralph that he had once taken a dim view about being able to get the money. Of course he

could get it. How could anyone, particularly Mockmann and Charlie, have the faintest doubt about his getting it? He was so positive, so bursting with hope, that he even broached the idea of asking the old man to pay off the debt for him.

"Sorry," Mockmann said. "But I phoned your father about that yesterday. I explained the situation, told him what might happen to you and I appealed to his loyalty and love as the father of an only son. A check in the mail wouldn't break him, or even bend him a little. But, Ralph, I regret to say this. He laughed and hung up on me."

Ralph dabbled at his swollen face with a wet towel. "But I'll get the money," he croaked. "There's a way. I'll find a way. Don't worry!"

"The battle's half won when you're rid of self-doubts, Ralph. But the question remains. How? I assume you've considered this problem before?"

"For years," Ralph admitted glumly. "Since I was a kid."

"Any ideas?"

"He'll die. I'll inherit the estate. Worth over ten million."

"But your father seems to have the durability of granite."

"Yes," Ralph said bitterly. "But he should go soon."

"Soon is a vague term. Do you mean within a week?"

"I'm afraid not. It looked favorable awhile back. Then he made a come-back, stronger than ever. He's been having wild parties up there every night. Drinking, whooping it up, like there was no tomorrow."

"Don't you have anything to sell, property of your own?"

"No."

"Any special talents, skills that might be expected to pay off?"

"I never developed any. Why should I have when I've got ten million coming to me?"

"How old is your father, Ralph?"

"He just celebrated his sixty-eighth birthday."

"A regular old goat, isn't he?"

"Looks like he'll outlive me."

"Very possible," Mockmann said.

"Unless you should, say, encourage the sluggish processes of nature."

"Huh?"

"You mean bump him off, boss?" chuckled Charlie.

"Please," Mockmann protested. "What I mean, Ralph, is that it seems as if the old man dropping dead is your only chance. I see no other alternative to your going for a ride with Charlie. I'd rather have the money, Ralph. It's being a bit too optimistic, isn't it, expecting the old goat to pass on in just seven

days? So—why not look at it this way? It's you or him."

Ralph's battered features expressed dazed bewilderment.

Mockmann and Charlie watched him with steady curiosity. Charlie mixed three bourbons and sodas. They drank and watched Ralph gulp his as if it were pure oxygen. Mockmann waited, drank, lit a cigar and watched with the tranquil patience associated with Oriental sages, and Charlie sprawled in a posture chair swirling ice-cubes.

Mockmann finally said, "Are you honestly feeling indecisive about this thing, Ralph?"

Ralph nodded. His hand shivered out for a refill. Charlie obliged.

"You love your old man?" Mockmann asked, warily.

"Of course not!" Ralph said.

"He doesn't impress me as being the sort of father who would be looked up to and idolized by a growing boy."

"Mother had to leave him a little after I was born. She said she was afraid I'd be like him. Two of us, she said, would be too much."

"Ralph, what can your objections possibly be to getting him out of the way, clearing the atmosphere for yourself, living the good life?"

"Why doesn't he just die like he's supposed to?" Ralph said.

"He's just a big bad Daddy-O all the way through," Charlie said. "Two hundred a month," Ralph muttered. "And he always makes me come in and beg him for it. Like a dog for a bone."

Mockmann leaned forward. And then Ralph found himself holding a peculiar looking revolver cautiously in both hands, like a bowl of hot soup.

"What's the matter, boy?" Mockmann said gently. "Tell Nick."

"I—I—"

"Come on, you can tell Nick."

Ralph put one chubby hand over lacerated eyes. "I—I've just never been given a chance to do anything on my own. All my life, all of it, I've just been waiting!"

"Now, now," crooned Mockmann. "You take the gun, go home, think it over. It's a matter of your own survival now. And you know, Ralph, I think you've got what it takes. I believe you'll stand up to it when the chips are down. It's you or him, don't forget that." Mockmann stood up. "Fix him another drink, Charlie."

Ralph sat sipping and blubbering. "I wouldn't know how to go about it," Ralph said. "It's a terrible thing and I'm not very practical. I wouldn't know how!"

"Just fix it so the cops don't finger you," Charlie said.

"A rather important point," said

Mockmann dryly. "I doubt if you would inherit much of value if the cops finger you for it."

"Make it look like a burglary job," Charlie said. "It looks like a struggle and they figure the old man resisted and got himself drilled. Something happens the cops get hold of the gun, don't worry. It's an Italian Beretta. Can't be traced. G.I. guys brought in enough of these foreign guns to keep gorillas in business for a hundred years."

Feeling Charlie's air of confidence called up a degree of assertiveness in Ralph. "I'll manage someway. Maybe it's just the method. I mean, the gun. It wouldn't be easy anyway to fake a burglary. The old man's bugged about burglary, kidnapping, blackmail threats and the like. The place is alarmed and has electric fences and bugs everywhere. Aren't there other ways? Couldn't it be an accident or something?"

Mockmann shrugged. "Use your initiative. Accidents are good, too. Lots of accidents are cleverly rigged every year. Well, you have a week, Ralph. Study some literature on the subject, explore the possibilities. But don't forget. You have just seven days."

"Oh, don't worry!" Ralph almost yelled. "Don't you worry, Mr. Mockman! I'll find a way!"

On his way back home that night, Ralph stopped at the Santa Barbara public library and stocked up on crime books. He was a compulsive reader of most forms of escape literature, but crime books had not been among them. He was surprised at how many factual treatises, as serviceable as do-it-yourself manuals, were available on the subject of homicide. It seemed to him that a careful study of these books, selective notes, a careful elimination of known errors, could assure anyone success in the disposal of an undesirable fellow.

As he drove through the electrified gate in the stone wall surrounding his father's estate, and drove up the winding hill toward an architectural monstrosity, he heard sounds of revelry. He parked in a maze of convertibles and slunk with his books past the huge pool to the shadows of the arcade, and up to his rooms on the second floor.

From there he could look down bitterly at the kleig-lighted swimming pool and patio, the steaks smoking on the brick barbecue pits, the giggling, Bikini-clad girls leaping in and out of the water. He stared for some time at these hated symptoms of his father's formidable vitality. He watched with loathing the way his father cavorted about.

Ralph lowered the Venetian blinds, showered, shaved, put on his robe, and settled down with his reference books.

Days passed.

The wild parties with which the old man flaunted his defiance of advancing years continued unabated. And Ralph, in his room most of the time with an ever-increasing library of reference books on murder, saw his seven days of grace flying by.

The tension grew. Ralph checked out more books. He made lists. He filed and cross-filed. He checked and re-checked. He filled several loose-leafed notebooks with notes. He eliminated one plan after another. There seemed always to be some flaw, some possibility of error.

Three days remained.

A call came from Mockmann, the sardonic voice of encouragement.

Desperate, Ralph became a perfectionist in his planning. He found himself enmeshed in a smothering, choking net of innumerable possibilities. It had to be done right. Exactly right. Perfect, he kept telling himself, mentally sweating his way once more through the maze of method, risk and whatnot. But perfection is not

easily attained, especially in just a few days.

Suddenly he realized there was only one day left.

He lay back drained with exhaustion, almost buried in books, notebooks, charts, graphs, mountains of discarded paper, sheafs of intricate scribblings, sliderules and T-squares. He gazed with a kind of resignation at the ceiling, as he listened to the festive sounds of the old man's marathonic ode to longevity going on into infinity, a taunting, laughing, maddening accompaniment to his threatening sense of defeat.

No, no! He would not admit defeat. Not this time. He must rally to his painful plotting, rejecting, replotting, cross-plotting. This time he had to succeed. His life depended on it.

One more day.

It was almost midnight when Ralph was startled by a burst of Dionysian hi-jinks just outside his door. Bongo drums, squeals and feminine giggling.

The door suddenly opened. Ralph Green, Sr. danced in through the debris of books and papers. He peered at Ralph reclining on the couch, inundated with papers and books. He looked at Ralph the way he always had, as if he were trying to adjust himself to the presence of a mysterious

stranger. Water dripped from the old man's sagging trunks. A wreath of wet flowers fluttered on his glabrous skull that shone like a brown greasy volleyball. He flourished a barbecue fork upon the end of which was skewered a two-pound chunk of dripping, charcoal-broiled tenderloin.

This he thrust into Ralph's face with fencing gestures.

"Eat, sonny," the old man urged. "You need energy. Plotting and carrying out a murder, that can take a lot out of a man."

"What?" Ralph said, shrinking back from the dripping steak.

"Can't keep secrets from your father, son," the old man said. Then he hopped back to the partly opened door through which the giggling was still audible. "Run along, glorious nymphs," the old man cooed, "but not too far!" Wild squeals receded in the direction of the pool as the old man closed the door and snapped the night lock. He sighed. "Ah youth, youth. You should have tried it, Ralph."

Ralph sat drawn up, feeling amoeboid. The old man knew all about it!

The old man looked around the room, back at Ralph. "You'll never cut the mustard, sonny. You've got yourself mired down again in details, doubts and superficialities. The way you've always prevented

yourself from doing anything worth while."

"Can't you give me anything, even a little privacy?" shouted Ralph. "I'm trying to work out a plot for a mystery novel."

The old man cackled and dropped the forked tenderloin on an open copy of the *World's Greatest Unsolved Murders*. He squatted on his haunches like an Australian native and cackled for a full minute.

"I know you're trying to plot out my murder, sonny."

"How can you say such a thing?"

"Easier than you can do it, sonny. I've been up here every day when you went out. I've known what you were up to. There's enough evidence scattered around. I've seen your steady systematic botching of another ambition."

"You're crazy!"

"I also got that call from your stupid hood friend, Mockmann. He's put the screws on you. Deliver or else. But you can't. You never will because you never have. You think I feel one pang of parental guilt for your failure? Oh no, sonny. You're the victim of a personality defect, most of which comes from the genes of your horrible mother! Not mine. All right, sonny, what's Mockmann's deadline?"

Ralph sat up shakily. His still-swollen face bobbed a bit wildly, like a precariously anchored balloon. "You're talking nonsense!"

"When's the deadline?"

"Tomorrow!"

"Well, sonny, you're going to succeed for once in your life, even if it kills me." The old man cackled again. "I'll see that you do succeed. You're going to murder me, and you're going to do a first-rate job of it. A really bang-up job."

Ralph whimpered slightly as the old man began throwing books and papers into the fireplace that soon began to roar up the flue. The old man had seen everything. He opened the lower bureau drawer and found the Italian Beretta which he waved with reckless daring. He pointed it at Ralph's head.

"On your feet, sonny."

"Dad!"

"Up, I say!"

Ralph leaped to his feet.

"I've arranged everything; nothing can go wrong," cackled the old man.

Ralph leaned against the wall and made small incoherent noises.

"Get dressed now, sonny. In a hurry now, timing's important. Vitally important. Walk past the pool, say good-bye to all the guests. They must think you're leaving. I'll go right down there after you're gone and substantiate the fact that

you're going into Santa Barbara for a few days. I've also arranged for witnesses to swear you were there all night."

The old man quickly scribbled two names and addresses on a slip of paper. "Here," he put it on the bureau. "Memorize these names and addresses. You should know who you spent the night with. It'll be an airtight alibi."

"For God's sake!" Ralph whispered. "How can you—?"

"But you won't really leave just yet," the old man grinned. "You'll circle back, come in through the window of my study. I'll be waiting there with the gun."

Ralph rubbed his hand across his face. Then he began dressing with the jerky movements of a mechanical man.

"I've severed the electric wiring on the left wall with wire-cutters," the old man said gleefully. "I've arranged for a mysterious stranger to be seen entering and leaving the grounds during the time of the murder. Money will solve anything, any problem, buy and sell men, turn truth into lies and vice-versa. Money talks, sonny. It also assures eternal silence. Now get moving."

Slightly dazed, Ralph did as he had been told to do. He said

good-bye to the guests, then circled around through the cypress trees, back down the dark hill toward the windows of his father's study. He didn't know what else to do. He only knew that the old man had never failed at anything to which he had once committed himself. The old man had something in mind, and there was no stopping him.

As Ralph crawled through the French windows, he saw the old man lying on the rug between the desk and the fireplace. In his trunks, the old man reminded Ralph of a monstrous rust-colored lizard on the red carpet. The wall safe was open. Money, papers were scattered over the floor. The desk drawers were open, and one drawer lay with contents scattered behind the executive chair. Drapes were ripped, vases broken, and the general effect was that of mayhem resulting from a fierce struggle.

The old man grinned up at Ralph. He raised the gun, butt first.

"This is it, sonny."

After some argument, Ralph found himself gripping the gun. "Why are you doing this?" Ralph finally was able to ask.

"Sonny, I'm giving you a break."

"But—but this is monstrous, incredible. It's—why it's some kind of gag. It has to be!"

"We're wasting time, sonny. You've got to do it in a hurry so the alibi and the rest of it will all check out. But I'll tell you why. I got a medical checkup last week. Prognosis strictly negative. Sure I look great, feel chipper. But there's a fatal malignancy in here, sonny. I've only got a month or so to go, anyway. So why shouldn't I take advantage of this great opportunity? It helps you. It makes my departure quick and relatively easy. The other way—the natural way—it would be long and very unpleasant. We're doing one another a big favor, sonny."

"I can't believe it."

"This way, bang, it's over. You can get Mockmann off your back, and get rid of me. I'll be rid of a few weeks of stupid unnecessary agony. Oh, it's a fact. Why do you think I've been living it up so high lately? I just wanted to get in a few good extra kicks before kicking off!"

Yes, it added up, Ralph thought. The old man could turn anything into a soaring triumph.

"Go on and shoot, sonny," the old man urged. "For God's sake don't bungle this. For once in your life, do something clean and direct and with some confidence."

Ralph felt the cold calming tide of accumulative resentment.

"I won't botch it," he said.

"Quick and neat, sonny, then run over the hill and down to the highway by the old Indian Spring. I've got the car parked there waiting for you."

"That's thoughtful of you. The whole thing is thoughtful. Considering my personality defect, you've been more considerate than I had any right to expect."

"Shoot!" the old man squealed. "Hurry!"

"I hear you, dad. Loud and clear."

Ralph emptied the Beretta, continued to fire so the hammer clicked repeatedly on empty cartridges. Then he scurried through the window, over the hill while screams and cries faded behind him.

Nick Mockmann was arrested, tried and convicted for the murder of Ralph Greene Sr. Seems the old man had called him, made an appointment to meet him on the estate a little after midnight when the murder occurred. Mockmann was seen there, seen leaving hurriedly during the melee. A posthumous note from the old man fingered him deeper. Clarifying evidence was produced revealing the motive—an attempt to collect by force a gambling debt incurred by Ralph Greene Jr. Substantiating

evidence included a taped telephone conversation between Ralph Greene Sr. and Mr. Mockmann during which Mr. Mockmann promised threats of bodily harm if the debt was not paid at once. As it turned out, the phones in the Greene mansion had always been bugged by the owner because Ralph Greene Sr. had always been prepared for kidnapping and blackmail threats.

The above development was a pleasant surprise to Ralph, who eagerly testified against Mockmann at the trial and managed to implicate Charlie as an accomplice. Ralph was impressed, awed by the old man's posthumous display of genius. He was also eager to get Mockmann and Charlie permanently behind bars, because he still was unable to pay his debts.

There had been mysterious delays in the matter of the will.

Ralph was finally summoned to the inner office of Cooper, Gault and Myers, Attorneys at Law. Mr. Cooper coughed self-consciously and avoided Ralph's apprehensive gaze.

"I'm afraid I have disheartening news for you, Ralph. It doesn't seem fair. But there's nothing I can do about it."

"About what?"

"First, your departed father—God rest his soul in peace—had

all cash assets, stocks, bonds, holdings, all converted into real estate, all said real estate adjoining his home grounds near Santa Barbara. In other words, there's only land. No cash."

"Is that bad? I can sell some of the land."

"Second, your father called my attention not long ago to the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed between Mexico and the United States when California was ceded to this country."

"That's ancient history," Ralph said. "What's that got to do with my inheritance?"

"The property on which your father's house and grounds are located, and all adjoining purchased lands, was given to one Antonio Del Valle in 1839. And the title contained this proviso: That it never be willed away to any living person if the owner died as a result of premeditated violence. I suppose this was to discourage any of his relatives from disposing of him unnaturally. Instead, the land must be given to the local government, and used for charitable religious purposes."

Ralph's lips moved silently. His eyes were slightly protuberant and glazed.

"It's absolutely valid and incontestable, I'm sorry to say, Ralph. I've explored every possibility of

loopholes. There aren't any. You simply can't inherit a thing, nothing at all. Not even the house or furnishings. It all goes to the county."

"But that was too long ago," Ralph rasped.

"When California became a part of the United States, our Congress in 1851 passed a law confirming all land titles existing at that time. And those Spanish laws are still in the State penal codes. I doubt if anyone would ever have referred to that old law, however, if your father hadn't brought it up. It's

odd, isn't it? It's as if he anticipated being done in. Especially when it cuts you out so completely."

Ralph stood up and started stiffly toward the door.

"The county's going to reserve that ground for a cemetery," said Mr. Cooper. "You know, for all those unfortunates who can't afford private funerals and burials? Ah—here's something I almost forgot, Ralph."

"Yes?" Ralph said, turning.

"Your father did make a proviso here. A burial plot is to be set aside for you there."



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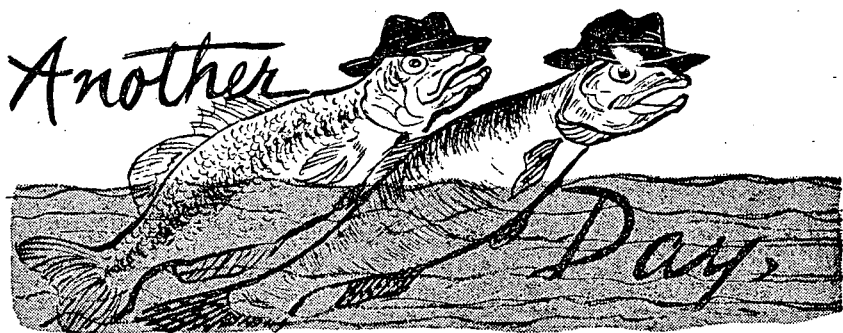
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NEITHER of the two cops could have told how this habit of theirs started, or why.

What they did was watch wreckers pull down the row of tenements where the housing development was going to be built. Whenever they had a chance, they drove over there and parked. Sometimes they got out of the car and sometimes they didn't. They bet nickels on when a wall would come down or which worker would step out next for a smoke or how long between wheelbarrow loads. They got to know some of the wrecking crew by sight and spoke to them casually, *Hello* and *How's it going* and stuff like that.



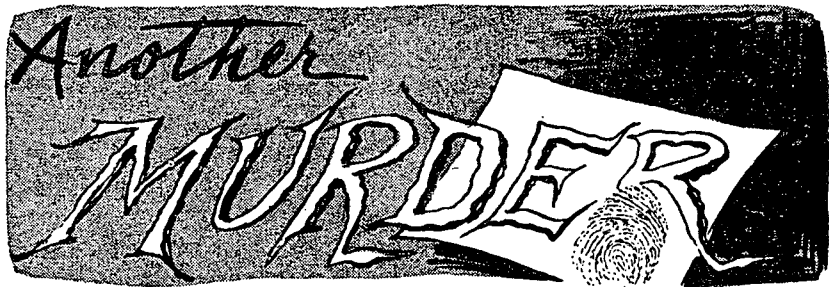
Bass was a big, plump, broad-shouldered guy; his eyes were very light blue. Salmon was tall and rangy. He had buck teeth; so his mouth was never quite closed. He sniffed a lot and had a dry, nasal voice.

Bass and Salmon, detectives. The rest of the boys called them the fish patrol and kidded the pants off them. The result was that Bass and Salmon stayed away from the precinct house as much as they could. They were stuck with each other, but they got along nicely and made a good team.

On that particular day, they were busy all morning and didn't get over to the construction site until around two o'clock. They parked across the street from number 748, where the main work was going on. They watched a load of plaster, brick and broken cement come roaring down a chute and into a truck.

Salmon cut the motor. Bass coughed and said, "That junk. It

"Taking one consideration with another, a policeman's lot is not a happy one," especially when the only fingerprint found on the scene of the crime turns-out to belong, not to a criminal, but to a policeman! One of New York's Finest, one might say.



gets into your lungs, doesn't it?"

Salmon agreed. Then they both stepped out of the car and started to cross the street.

The truck driver yelled at them. "Hey," he said. "You come for the excitement?"

"What excitement?" Salmon asked.

"Guy found some jewels and ran off with them."

"You kidding?" Bass said.

"Ask anybody," the truck driver said. "They'll tell you."

Salmon glanced at his partner. "I'll check in," he said. He walked over to the car, picked up the two-way radio phone and told the precinct dispatcher that he and Bass were leaving the car for a few minutes on an investigation.

Bass waited, staring at the board-

ing with which the ancient buildings were fenced in, the warped lumber and old doors and disintegrating plywood. When Salmon returned, the two of them headed for the shack from which the foreman, Bill Donlan, superintended the wrecking operation. He saw them coming and stood, a big, bloated man, filling the doorway.

"Hi," he said, in a rough bass. "Anything I can do for you?"

"We're after the treasure," Bass said, grinning. "Who found it?"

"Oh, that," Donlan said. "Tony Amalfi. Maybe you can get it straight; I can't. Come on."

He picked up a baseball bat before he crossed the broken sidewalk and stepped into what had once been a store. The smell of damp decay was strong.

"Watch your step," Donlan said. He slapped the bat against a plank to test its solidness. "You never know when this stuff is rotted out."

He led the way up a couple of narrow flights of stairs that no longer had banisters. The third floor was roofless, and he picked his way over the rubbish-strewn floor and headed for a gap in the wall. He crossed a couple of buildings in various stages of ruin and reached one on which a gang was working.

He called out in his deep, rasping voice, "Hey, you guys. These officers want to talk to you."

Salmon glanced at the workmen, then at the walls of a room that had once been blue. Big chunks of plaster had been ripped off, and the wooden lathing was exposed. A partly dismantled fireplace was open to the sky.

Bass did most of the questioning. Tony Amalfi had been taking down the chimney when he'd suddenly yelled out. The other workers thought he was hurt, but he'd merely reached into a hole in the chimney and removed a small black box. He'd stood there, examining the contents. Jewel box, they thought, but they weren't sure. He'd snapped it shut before any of them could see inside it.

They all had theories—the box

contained jewelry or money or old documents, something like that. But the only certainties were that Tony had found something, had been excited, had put the stuff in his lunch box and walked off the job.

Salmon and Bass examined the chimney hiding place. It measured a couple of brick-lengths each way.

"Tony's a crazy guy," Donlan said. "Wait till he comes back, I'll get it out of him."

"Where does he live?" Salmon asked.

"Come on back to the office and I'll look it up."

That was all there was to it. Salmon and Bass got the address and returned to the car. They were busy the rest of the afternoon and had no time to follow up on Tony Amalfi. Nor did it seem important. He didn't have the connections for disposing of expensive jewelry. If he tried to get away with something valuable, he'd be caught. And if the thing wasn't worth much, who cared? Besides, Donlan had said he'd handle it. So some time tomorrow, they'd stop by and ask him about it.

The next morning they had a robbery to investigate, nothing out of the ordinary, but it would take them an hour or so. They were on the way there when the dispatcher

called them. Salmon was driving, so Bass took the call. The dispatcher ordered them up to an alley off Merrill Street, where a body had been found.

The alley was a dead-end between two buildings, one of which contained a pizza restaurant. The cop on the beat was holding off a small crowd that kept shoving forward in order to get a look. Salmon and Bass cleared the alley and walked back. Some garbage pails partly hid the body of a muscular little guy in a brown suit. He was lying on his stomach, and his head was bashed in.

The uniformed cop explained, "The restaurant people put their garbage out in the evening and leave it in the alley overnight. In the morning the porter lugs it out to the sidewalk, where it gets picked up around ten o'clock. When he came out this morning, he saw this. Says he didn't touch anything."

Bass bent down and felt the wrist of the corpse. He stood up quickly. "Feels cold," he said. "Killed some time during the night."

"Killed over there," Salmon said. He pointed to some stains near the mouth of the alley. "Dragged back and dumped where nobody'd notice him for awhile."

Bass grimaced, drew back and

stared at the body. The face was partly hidden by the outstretched arm. "I've seen that guy somewhere," he said.

"You and your memory," Salmon said, squinting. His lips balled out more than usual as he forced himself to bend down and examine what he could see of the face. He stood up with relief. "Yeah," he said. "Seems like I've seen him, too."

Bass swung around and walked rapidly to the rear of the alley. Salmon rocked on his heels and let his eyes drag themselves along the surface of the pavement and come to rest on the body. The garbage pail must have been knocked over the night before, because cheese paste from the pizzas was smeared on the ground and splattered against the brick wall. With his fingernail, Salmon dislodged a small blob. It had dried out and hardened like cement, but it was also powdery and flaked off into nothing.

The crowd kept watching him expectantly. He heard somebody say, "What is it? What's he got?"

"Cheese," somebody answered.

Then another voice exploded in a guffaw. "Cheese it," it said, "the cops!"

The crowd laughed, but with a jeering note that made Salmon uncomfortable. He supposed they

wanted him to do something dramatic—or, at least, interesting—and were tired of waiting. But he never could figure out civilians. Either they were scared of you, or else they hated you for no reason.

With a gesture of disdain, Salmon opened his jacket, took a deep breath and let his holstered gun show. This display of power gave him a certain satisfaction. Stony-faced, he pulled the jacket lapels together again, smoothed down his coat and buttoned it.

When Bass came back from the other end of the alley, Salmon said in a low voice, "I'm sure it's him. You know who I mean?"

Bass gave a decisive nod. "Right," he said.

Neither of them mentioned Tony Amalfi's name, but they both felt that Tony must have found a genuine treasure, and been killed on account of it.

"He always showed up first with a wheelbarrow," Bass said. "Won me quite a few nickels."

Salmon grunted, moved to the wall opposite the restaurant and leaned against the brick. There was nothing more to do until the lieutenant and the headquarters brass showed up and took charge. But Bass pranced around energetically, while his eyes made quick, darting glances at everything. Suddenly Salmon called to him.

"Look," Salmon said, pointing. "Guy stepped in some garbage and left us a nice footprint. That heel—perfect, huh?"

Bass jerked to attention, started to march forward and stopped himself. He lifted his foot awkwardly and studied the bottom of his shoe.

"Mine," he said tersely. "Just stepped in the stuff."

He rubbed his shoe methodically to scrape off the goo. A couple of minutes later, the first siren sounded.

The lieutenant listened to what Salmon and Bass had to say and then brought them over to the commissioner.

"These boys of mine are right on the ball," the lieutenant said. "They know who the decedent was and why he was killed. Now, if we can just learn what Amalfi found, we're on our way. Otherwise, this case can mean trouble."

"Thorough, conscientious police work will do the trick," the commissioner said pompously. He gave Salmon and Bass the privilege of his personal attention. "Men," he said in a stentorian tone, "I know you'll do honor to the department. What are your names?"

Bass stuttered out his answer and the commissioner repeated the names in surprise.

"Well, they're easy enough to re-

member," he boomed out, and laughed. "But don't go after any red herrings, you hear, because I'll be keeping an eye on you."

Salmon nodded, turned and started elbowing his way through the crowd. He felt a tug at his sleeve and he looked down at a small boy.

"Mister," the boy said, "I found this. It was behind one of those cartons." He pointed to some rubbish at the entrance to the alley, and he handed Salmon a green lunch box.

Salmon examined the box. It had a mottled surface, the kind that won't take fingerprints, and there was a smear of cheese near one corner. There was nothing inside.

"Thanks, sonny," Salmon said and kept on going. He put the lunch box in the trunk of the car, and got in behind the wheel. He figured he'd look like a jackass if he went back and admitted that a kid had spotted something which he and Bass had missed—and, it was likely, the kid had found it before they arrived on the scene. Besides, he couldn't take any more of the commissioner's hot air.

After a couple of minutes, Bass climbed into the front seat of the car. "Glad to be clear of that guy," he said. "Him and his sense of humor." Bass snorted with contempt. "You know what he said after you

left? He wanted us to report to him direct, so he'd be sure we didn't pull any boners."

"No kidding?" Salmon said. He started the car and raced the motor. "Can't he read the manual? Don't he know we're working out of the precinct?"

"That's what the lieutenant told him; so His Nibs said okay, just so we made an arrest before morning. Said that ought to be easy, with the start we got."

"Didn't tell us who to arrest, did he?" Salmon asked drily.

"Sure he did. He said get the killer, or else." Bass tapped his partner's arm. "Or else means back in uniform."

"He can't do that," Salmon said angrily, "except for cause. That's what the manual says. We could go to court on that."

"And get our pictures in the paper? Salmon and Bass. We couldn't show our faces after the ribbing we'd take."

"Yeah," Salmon said with distaste. "So what do we do now?"

"Go to Amalfi's. Lieutenant's going to check on who lived in that apartment where the stuff was found. He'll let us know, as soon as he can run it down."

"Right," Salmon said.

He shot the car forward and headed for the boulevard. Neither he nor Bass mentioned the com-

missioner again, but they were both sullen, edgy and anticipated trouble.

Tony Amalfi's house was in a development at the other end of town. His wife opened the door. She had a pretty enough face, and later on—when they were talking about her—Bass figured her waist at fifty inches, while Salmon held out for forty-five. They never did find out.

"You come about Tony?" she asked, as soon as they'd identified themselves.

"What about Tony?" Bass asked.

"Did something happen to him?" she asked anxiously. "He wasn't home all night. I've been worried."

"Where'd he go?"

"He didn't say. Officer, did something happen? *Tell me.*"

Bass looked at Salmon, and Salmon looked at Bass.

"He found something on the job," Bass said. "What was it?"

"I don't know. He came back early, around five, and I cleaned his lunch box. He stayed near the phone and he got two calls." She let out her breath in a sigh. "Nobody calls Tony that early, he's never home before six."

"Who called him?"

"I don't know. I was in the kitchen."

"When did he go out again?"

"Right after dinner. He took his lunch box and said he might get home late, but Tony doesn't stay out all night. Not him. Tell me—what happened?"

"He got killed," Salmon said quietly. And turning to Bass, said, "Better ask one of the neighbors to come over."

On the way back to the car, Salmon remembered the lunch box. "I got it in the trunk," he said. "I'll get it, so you can see it."

Bass glanced at the lunch box without interest. "Anything inside it?"

"No."

"Better let Mrs. Amalfi take a look at it. Find out if it's Tony's."

Salmon nodded, picked up the lunch box and went back to the house. When he returned he said, "It's his, all right." He made out an identification tag and tied it onto the handle. Bass watched, then climbed into the car and picked up the phone to report.

The dispatcher had a message. "The apartment Amalfi found the stuff in," the dispatcher said, "belonged to a man named Richard Lopez. Landlord says Lopez moved out a year ago, owing rent. Employed by the telephone company. Lieutenant says to find out what you can from the company."

"Right," Bass said.

Salmon started to turn the igni-

tion key, but Bass stopped him. "Wait a minute," Bass said, frowning. "This guy Lopez, Richard Lopez. We had a bulletin on him. Let me think."

"You can think while I'm driving, can't you?"

"I'll place the guy after awhile," Bass said. "While you were inside, this woman next door—she told me there was a car parked across the road last night. Lights were off, but somebody was sitting in it, smoking. Over there, by those trees."

"What kind of car?"

Bass shrugged. "Two-tone with a white trunk. And big fins."

Salmon punched the door open. "Let's have a look," he said.

They marched over to the clump of trees and examined the surface of the adjacent road. There was a small patch of oil slick on the macadam, and the shoulder showed tire marks. The two detectives studied the soil carefully.

"Can't identify tires from that," Salmon said. "No detail. What time did the car leave?"

"She thought around eleven. I don't see any cigarette butts, either."

"Ash tray," Salmon said laconically, and headed back to the car.

He drove jerkily, and faster than usual. Bass stared through the windshield and was busy with his

own thoughts. He said suddenly, "Richard Lopez. I got it now. A Missing Persons bulletin. No follow-up that I can remember."

"Then there was none," Salmon said. "Better tell the lieutenant."

Bass leaned forward to call the precinct.

The guy they saw at the phone company was a district manager or an exchange superintendent or a personnel supervisor, they didn't get his title straight, or care. He was polite enough and he dug up Lopez's record.

"He hasn't been with us for more than a year," the phone guy said.

"Why not?" Salmon asked.

"It doesn't say."

"What does it say?"

"Nothing."

"Can I have a look at that?" Salmon asked.

"It's confidential."

Salmon stood up irritably. His worry, his anger at the commissioner, all his pent-up feelings came to a head. "Let's have that paper," he said. "Confidential stuff—I don't buy that line."

"Officer," the phone guy said. "You have no right—"

Salmon grabbed the sheet out of the man's hand. It read, "Discharged for cause." He slapped the sheet of paper down on the desk and said, "What was the cause?"

"I don't know."

"Listen, Buster—you want trouble, you'll get it."

Bass slid between the two men. "Skip it," he said. "Let the lieutenant handle him."

Salmon swung around. "Sure," he said. "I got maybe an idea, anyhow."

Salmon didn't mention what it was, but he would have given heavy odds that Bass had the same idea. Wire tap.

The rest of the day they tried to forget the commissioner, and they worked the way cops work. They made no smart deductions and concocted no theories. They knew if they waited long enough, witnesses would turn up, police files would be consulted, important information would drop in their laps. Other men were busy with other leads, and the lieutenant would tie everything together. Patience and a minimum of imagination—that was their dish. The lieutenant would go to bat for them. He was paid to worry; they weren't. Still—

Salmon ticketed the lunch box and turned it in for the lab boys to examine. He signed for it, and he and Bass drove off. They proceeded quietly on their rounds.

The next item that dropped in their laps came from the dispatcher. "Proceed to the Quick-

Service Television Shop, 1817 North, and question Peter Milano. Amalfi tried to contact him yesterday."

After Bass had repeated the address, the dispatcher's voice dropped to a casual tone. "Hey," he said, "what's with you and the commissioner? He called a little while ago and said he wanted the pair of you in his office first thing in the morning. Said he liked fish for breakfast. You been making jokes with him?"

"Just mind your own business," Salmon said.

The dispatcher laughed. "My, my!" he said, "aren't we touchy!"

Salmon slammed down the phone.

On the way to the Quick-Service Television Shop he and Bass simmered down.

Pete Milano, young, black-eyed, was waiting for them. He said he was Tony Amalfi's nephew and that Tony had dropped in on him yesterday afternoon around two-thirty.

"I wasn't here," Milano said. "He left word he'd be down at the corner place for awhile—my uncle liked his beer—and that he had to see me."

"About what?" Bass asked.

"He didn't say. I got back a little after five and I called him. He asked if he could come up and use

my tape-recorder, but I had a service call to make, and then a date with my girl for that night. I tried to stall him off, but he said it was important and that he'd be up right after dinner. Well, he never got here."

"How long did you wait?" Bass asked.

"Till around eight-thirty. My girl—"

"So maybe he did get here, after you left."

"If he did," Milano said, "he'd have gone down to the corner, for a beer. And I'd have seen him, because that's where I was."

"Did he say what he wanted to hear on your machine? Did he say anything about the tape?"

"Nothing. Officer, he was such an innocent little guy, he couldn't be involved in anything crooked."

"What makes you think there was something crooked?" Salmon asked.

"Well . . ." Milano blinked uncomfortably, as if he was sorry he'd made the remark. "He was killed, wasn't he?"

Bass, fussing around the far corner of the shop, said suddenly, "You do all kinds of repair work, don't you?"

"Anything with wires, I can fix it."

"You and Lopez?" Bass said casually.

Milano looked startled. "Who's Lopez?" he asked.

Bass didn't answer. He glanced at Salmon and started out. Salmon followed him to the car and said, "He didn't bite on that one, but who knows? So how about a beer?"

"The beer'll keep," Bass said. "We got a session with the lieutenant ahead of us, and he can smell a beer breath a mile off."

"Yeah," said Salmon.

At the precinct, the lieutenant was waiting for them in his office, and they went right in. He was strictly business.

"I got the medical and the lab reports here," he said, "and there's one little item you better think about, because the commissioner's likely to mention it." He glared coldly. "They found a fingerprint on that lunch box, and you know whose it is? One of my own detectives!"

"They're cock-eyed," Salmon said angrily. "That surface won't take prints. Impossible."

"Some cheese got rubbed on it, and that's what took the print."

"Oh," Salmon said. "Look, Lieutenant—those things happen—"

"They shouldn't," the lieutenant said crisply. "Particularly when the commissioner is on your neck."

"The lab boys could have skipped it," Bass said.

The lieutenant cleared his throat. "Well, let's get down to business. They found wood splinters in Amalfi's skull, so we know he was hit with some kind of a club. Lab says it was hard wood, stained brown. He got killed around eleven or twelve, maybe a little earlier but not after midnight. Now—what did you boys come up with?"

He listened attentively while they spoke. He kept thumping his feet against the desk, which annoyed Salmon. Bass, however, seemed to enjoy the sound.

"Any leads on Lopez?" Bass asked.

The lieutenant shook his head. "He just dropped out of sight. No trace of him."

"Could have left town," Salmon remarked.

"And the state and the country," the lieutenant added. "And this physical world, too."

The detectives tried to look sorrowful, without success. The lieutenant stopped thumping.

"It's beginning to shape up," he said. "There was this wire-tapping business a year ago."

He didn't have to tell them about that. The lieutenant had been the guy who broke the case, and he'd exposed a few cops who had been in on the racket. A departmental shake-up had followed,

and the lieutenant had gotten his big promotion from the ranks.

"I don't remember coming across Lopez's name," he said thoughtfully, "but he could have been one of the mechanics that hooked up wires. The phone company did some investigating of their own and fired quite a few people. I guess Lopez was one of them."

"We figured it that way," Salmon said.

"Let's say Lopez got hold of one of the tapes that was a recording of a phone conversation," the lieutenant said. "It incriminated somebody. When Lopez got fired, he needed money and decided to shake this somebody down. But instead of collecting, he got knocked off."

"And left the tape, or a copy of it, in his apartment," Bass said. "Hidden in the chimney, until Tony found it."

"And Tony got in touch with this same somebody who'd knocked off Lopez," the lieutenant said, "and tried to put the bite on him. That tells us the motive for killing Tony. And I'd say the killer got the tape and destroyed it. That's where we stand, right now."

"How," said Salmon, "did Tony know who this guy was? Tony hadn't heard the tape played, be-

cause he never got together with his nephew."

"That's what the nephew says," Bass said mildly.

"Let's cut the guesswork," the lieutenant said. "We know Tony got two calls yesterday and one of them was from his nephew. The second was from somebody who knew Tony had gone home early, and maybe knew Tony had found that tape. Well, who qualifies?"

"There was the gang working on the job with him," Salmon said, "but I can't see how they'd tie in. Just a bunch of bricklayers."

The lieutenant leaned back. "I think we're getting somewhere," he said. "Donlan. Bring him in."

Salmon stood up dutifully.

Bass said, "About that lab report—could it tell if those splinters came from a baseball bat?"

"Maybe," the lieutenant said. "Why?"

"Donlan had one at his shack. He used it to test the planking. Want us to get hold of it?"

"I'll send someone else for it," the lieutenant said. "And you'd better have dinner first. Anyway, I want to get a line on Donlan before you bring him in."

He picked up the phone and was working as Salmon and Bass left the room.

Donlan's house was a lot fancier than anything you'd expect a con-

struction foreman to have. Donlan opened the door himself and said in his rasping voice, "My family's away, down in Florida, so I'm all alone. Glad to see you, boys. What's on your mind?"

"Lieutenant wants to talk to you," Bass said.

"What about?"

"He'll tell you," Salmon said. "Come on."

"Now look, boys, don't be in such a hurry. Let's sit down and have a drink, and we can talk things over."

"No soap," Bass said.

Donlan stiffened. "I got a right to know," he said hoarsely.

Neither of the cops answered, but they moved in on him from both sides, ready for trouble, each of them knowing exactly what the other one would do.

Bass held back a couple of feet and slid his hand underneath his jacket and rested his fingers on his gun.

Salmon stepped forward, grabbed Donlan by the arm and spun him around. "Come on," he said, "and stop arguing."

Before they took Donlan in, Bass opened the garage doors of Donlan's house. He saw a two-tone car with a white trunk, and big fins. He closed the doors. When he marched over to Salmon, he gave a half-wink.

Back at the precinct, it was routine. The questioning, the relay of cops; the gradual breaking down. At eight o'clock, Donlan was saying he'd been home alone the night before looking at TV, that he'd never phoned Tony or thought of Tony or even guessed that Tony had found a tape. As for the baseball bat that had been in his shack, Donlan couldn't explain its disappearance. Somebody must have taken it, he said. Maybe to frame him.

By nine, the lieutenant had Donlan involved in last year's wire-tapping and Donlan was making vague admissions about paying somebody off for keeping quiet about padded payroll and labor kickbacks.

And by ten, the lieutenant had Donlan reeling, and Donlan began making more admissions. Yes, he'd spoken to Tony when Tony had walked off yesterday. Yes, he knew what Tony had found; he'd figured Tony might be onto a good thing and he'd wanted a piece of it, so he'd phoned Tony later in the afternoon and Tony had promised to bring the tape, but Tony hadn't kept his promise. Yes, the car across the road had been Donlan's. He'd gone to find Tony, but he insisted that he'd missed Tony and had never seen him or spoken to him since the

phone call. Donlan claimed he'd waited from eight until after eleven, when he finally gave up and went home. And that was the story he stuck to for the next hour.

With no confession in sight for awhile, the lieutenant took Bass and Salmon into his office for a coffee break. They were tired, brain-weary and not too hopeful.

"We got him on the ropes, but not knocked out," the lieutenant said. He pushed the pile of reports out of his way, so that he'd have elbow room to stir his coffee. "Even if the lab proves Tony was killed with a baseball bat, how do we prove the bat was Donlan's and that Donlan swung it? What we need right now is a bright idea."

Salmon fingered the reports. He was an unhappy guy, being on the spot with the commissioner. It was just his luck to get his fingerprint on the one spot on the lunch box that would take a print. And now he had an idea all right, but he wasn't sure that he had the nerve to come out with it. Guessing was no good, unless you could back up your guess with proof.

"The funny thing is," he said, slowly, carefully, "I believe that last story of Donlan's."

"Huh?" Bass said, surprised. "Why?"

"Because," Salmon answered,

still slowly, as if he were groping for something, "Donlan admits he left Tony's house around eleven and came home. That leaves him wide open. If he's guilty, why didn't he claim he stayed there until one or two in the morning? That would make sense."

The lieutenant sipped his coffee. "What are you driving at?" he asked. "The nephew?"

Salmon lowered his eyes and fidgeted with the reports. The one on top was about the fingerprint on pizza cheese. He read the brief sentences, and his heart suddenly lurched. He knew, knew definitely, his hunch was right.

"No," Salmon said. "I mean us. Bass and me—we also knew all about Tony's finding that tape."

"Go ahead," the lieutenant said.

"You hooked a lot of cops in the wire-tap," Salmon said, "but it looks like you missed out on at least one. The one who got Lopez—and Tony Amalfi."

"Go on," the lieutenant said.

"Donlan was framed all right—by somebody who knew he had a baseball bat, and who used it. As for me, last night I went to a birth-

day party where a dozen people saw me all evening. What about you, Bass? Where were you?"

"You're off your rocker," Bass said. "What about evidence?"

"Your footprint was there in the alley. That's evidence."

"I explained that."

"But it got me thinking. And now here's this fingerprint. I thought it was mine, but it says here in the report that the print's yours. And from that time the kid gave me the lunch box, you never even touched it. Besides, when I got the box, that cheese was too hard to take a print; the cheese crumbled when you touched it. But when the garbage pail was knocked over around midnight, the cheese was undoubtedly soft, and that's when you took the incriminating tape out of the lunch box, after you killed Tony . . ."


Bass gaped and started stammering a denial.

Salmon, watching happily, wondered who his next partner would be. Someone, he hoped, with a nice, ordinary name—like Rumpelmeyer, say—so the boys couldn't make jokes.

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You will be intrigued, I hope, by the machinations of our heroine, Charleen . . . or do I mean, Sherraleen? I never can keep those two girls straight, with the ghosts of their other sisters, Darleen, Marleen, Caroleen, Noraleen, hovering in the background. One or both parents must have had a weakness for alliteration, and a woeful lack of judgment.



THE BOX of candy came at ten-thirty in the morning. I opened the door when I saw the delivery boy, and signed for the package. It was small and brown and it rattled like chocolates and so I said, "Must be candy for my sister. She gets it and I eat it." And then I smiled at him because he had a pleasant looking face and I always find it easier to smile at the pleasant ones.

There wasn't a mark anywhere on the box, though I looked carefully and then I called Charleen. She drifted in from the pool, Thad trailing after her, and I handed her a towel, along with the candy because, otherwise, she'd stand there, dripping on the oriental.

You see, Charleen is the last of my five sisters—the other four having conveniently died without too much fuss—a fall from a mountain top for Darleen, a boating accident for Marleen, a bolting horse for Caroleen, and a hunting mishap for Noraleen.

It was really like Father had said. "All my daughters are such simple little kittens, except for two—you, Sherraleen and Charleen.

Charleen is a full-grown cat and the clever one, while—well, you're the odd one."

"Oh, but I'm not," I said, "I'm really much more clever than Charleen."

But he only laughed at me and I never did convince him. When he died he left each of us a tidy sum of money, and remembering his words, I sat back and watched. And Charleen *was* clever and maybe I was odd, but after all who wants just a tidy sum when it can so easily be a tidy fortune.

"Here's more candy," I said, casually, "still no name. And dry your feet."

Charleen took the box eagerly, her slim fingers tearing off the paper. "Isn't it exciting," she said to Thad, "someone keeps sending me the candy—this is the third box—and he never puts his name on it."

Thad scowled. He always scowls when Charleen mentions another man. I'd think he was a fortune hunter except that his father owns fifty oil wells.



THE WAITING GAME

by Pat Stadley

"How do you know it's a he?" he asked.

Charleen arched her eyebrows at him and wiggled her hips. She does a very effective job. It's the only course she completed in four years of finishing school.

"Well, pass the candy around," I said.

She gave me a sharp little look from under her long, golden lashes and pouted. "You ate all of the last box!" she accused. "Besides, with your weight problem, you shouldn't eat candy, as if I had to tell you that."

"And that's why," I explained to Detective Barrows, when the doctor called him late that night, "I never even sampled a piece."

"Good thing," he said, "that candy was loaded with enough arsenic to have wiped out half the town."

"She's going to be all right?" I asked.

"Yeah," he said shortly. "A stomach pump's pretty thorough."

I let him prowl the house, poking his nose here and there, and even gave him the wrapping paper from off the candy box.

He stood there reading it and then he looked at me. His face wasn't at all pleasant. "Well, it was addressed to her, definitely, so they didn't mean it for you."

"It must have been a practical joker," I said. "Everyone loves Charleen!"

"Well, evidently someone has stopped," he answered and he went out the door without even a good-bye.

It was a week later when the power steering went out on Charleen's new, bright red convertible. Our house sits high on a hill and the driveway curves down between a long row of tall palm trees that our great grandfather planted. Charleen always drives like she's handling a jet and even at night she usually hits fifty halfway down the hill. There's a gentle curve right there and this is where the tie-rod snapped.

But Charleen has excellent reflexes. Seconds before she hit the tree, she'd rolled herself in her fur coat and when the engine went through the firewall, she was curled up on the seat in a tight ball.

Detective Barrows all but moved in with us then. I'd never seen such a persistent worker. He dug up the men in Charleen's love life, and lined them up like wooden soldiers.

I think Thad was horrified to find he was number 33. I consoled him as much as possible, but he hung around Charleen with his wounded heart showing like a red badge.

Charleen was bored. Nothing tires her so much as an old love affair. As for the two attempts on her life, well, it was like she said, smiling up at Detective Barrows, "I've got seven lives left, you know," and she laughed in that intimate lower tone register. I could see Barrows going down for the count.

Charleen had never had a policeman in love with her before, and it fascinated her. But it made me nervous, because he never quite forgot he was a policeman, and I'd find him prowling the library and reading letters and sniffing through the kitchen canisters. I finally took my diary and burned it, and when I found him poking through the ashes, I laughed right out loud.

He went away at last, officially that is, but he was still around romantically—number 34 on Charleen's list.

But I will say this for Thad. He never gave up and he did have fifty oil wells.

We gave a big party the last weekend in August. We invited everyone we could think of, know-

ing they'd bring just as many more. Charleen always leaves the details to me while she plays hostess. She really scintillated that evening, and while I made sure the ice buckets were filled with champagne and the tables laden with food, she floated from group to group, her passage noted by everyone in the room.

It was during this time that she drank the glass filled with a Martini loaded with strychnine. And if Detective Barrows hadn't been glued to her side from the beginning, she would have gone out on her third life.

But he had an inhalator squad waiting down the hill, and they were there in two minutes.

"Third time's a charm," I said to Barrows, "you'd better work faster."

He only looked at me.

The fourth and fifth times, nobody was sure. A car swerved at her when she was crossing a street. It missed and Barrows said the driver was probably drunk, and then, Arroe, her horse, threw her when he shied at something white in the bushes.

It was October when Thad cooked up the hunting trip. There were five couples, not that I was with anyone particularly, but since both Thad and Barrows were escorting Charleen, I kept it even.

Hunting is one sport I really like. Father taught me how to center five shots, each touching the other. He worked with Charleen, too, but she invariably missed with the first shot.

We drove out to the camp in different cars. I was last because I was bringing out the food, and when I got there, only Thad was waiting. He was sitting on a stump looking very glum.

"They're up on the north shore," he said when he saw me. "We're supposed to play dog." And then he got up and tramped off.

I'm used to playing dog on a deer hunt, so I took up my rifle and started out. It was very hot and when I passed the station wagon I saw Charleen's light blue jacket hanging on the door, so I took off my own heavy suede and picked up hers.

I was working my way up toward the north shore, taking an old familiar back trail, watching for a deer run, when the first shot went over my head. But not very far over. I heard it sing as it passed. I fell flat, rolled in the weeds, one movement ahead of the second shot and then found a log and behind it, water. I swam a long way on the bottom until I saw weeds and then I came up just far enough to breathe air.

I lay hidden until I heard voices

calling along the trail and I could come out. Everybody stood staring at me while I wrung the water out of my clothes. I must have looked awful, because Barrows was acting very disturbed. Charleen began laughing.

"It's not so funny," I said and pointed to the hole in her blue jacket, "because there went your sixth life."

She stopped laughing then, and put a hand out towards Barrows, but Thad took it and scowled at me.

As for Barrows, he had a funny light in his eyes and he was just like a policeman again, prowling around the weeds and sighting along the deer run until I told him I was cold and he could look for clues by himself. He took me home then.

I waited for Charleen, and when Thad brought her home, I shooed him out and then I said to her:

"Well, you really pulled a boner this time."

"Whatever do you mean?" she said and her blue eyes widened.

"Oh, your scheme was clever enough. And if you had killed me,

everyone would have thought it was a case of mistaken identity. Only you missed, and now you've crossed me off Barrow's list as number one suspect, and much as he hates to admit it, that only leaves you."

She frowned a little.

"Of course," I said slowly. "I could tell Barrows about the little mishaps to all the others."

She pouted a bit and then she shrugged her shoulders. "Well?" she said.

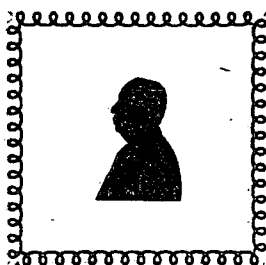
"It's really quite simple. Just forget your half of Father's money and Barrows will get no help from me."

She didn't like it at all, but there wasn't much else she could do. And then, just as I knew she would, she married Thad and all those oil wells.

As for me, I'm just sitting back and waiting, because with Charleen's flair—well, she'll make a lovely and wealthy widow. And after all, I *am* her only closest living relative.

Odd, did you say? Not a bit. Don't all things come to those who wait?





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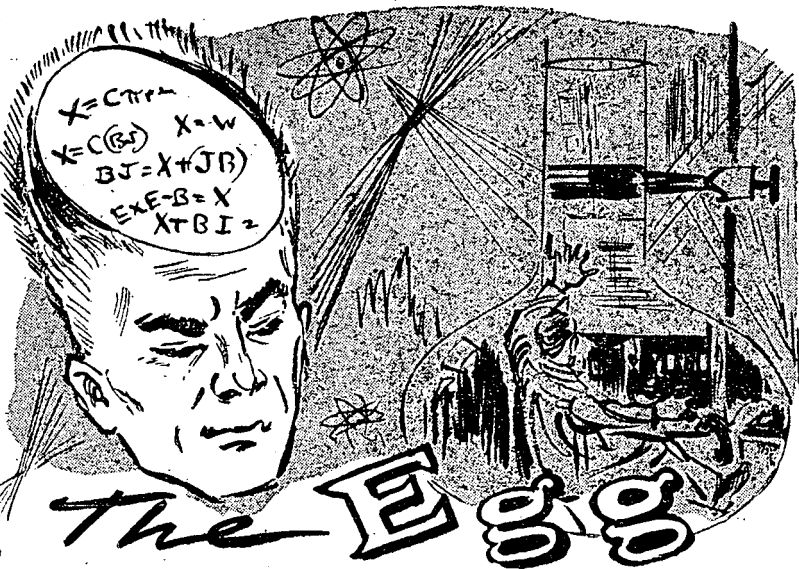
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The Egg

I SHOULD have kept my big mouth shut, but I was tired that night. When I got home there was a letter from our oldest, Doris, telling us she had married the scientist. Maybe I was a little put out that she hadn't brought him home to meet us first. Mostly, though, I was disappointed that she hadn't married a cop.

Anyway, I snorted, "Marrying an egg head? Huh!"

Donald and Billie and Joanne and Patricia, who had been excited at the news, sobered at once. Mom—that's my wife, Janet, but I've called her Mom or Mama since the day Doris was born—said, "Now John! That's no way to talk."

"I'm just tired," I said. "Had a rough day." I'm Captain Provident, Chief of Homicide for the past eight years. Sometimes I'm hanging onto my job by the skin of my teeth,

Many titles have been bestowed upon me by my public, but Egg Head is not among them. Humpty-Dumpty comes closest to it. Can it be that modern methods of laboratory deduction are replacing the tea leaves, crystal ball, and almanac? I shall read on . . .

but I never let my family know that. My kids are sure that I'm the greatest brain since Sherlock Holmes.

Hoping to find something to cheer me up, I read on in the letter. "Born and raised in Boston?" I said in dismay. This meant he was a Harvard or Yale graduate, and brought to my mind the endless string of fuzz-faced college

Head

boys assigned to the Department, who tried to tell me my business—and sometimes succeeded.

My dismay was so ludicrous that Billie started to laugh. Then they were all laughing at me, and I felt better about Doris getting married.

"I guess it's okay," I said in better humor, giving the letter back to Mom.

But it wasn't. We'd been a close-knit family, until Doris left for California two years ago. Her absence had been almost like a death in the family, and her frequent

letters hadn't helped much. We missed her.

She had been twenty-five then and a good secretary. She hadn't found anyone in Central City to marry (plenty of them had wanted her including some mighty fine boys on the force, but she had turned thumbs down on all of them) so she had moved to San Francisco, though God knows why San Francisco.

She'd worked at a couple of jobs she didn't like too well, and had been on the point of coming back home when she hooked onto a job at the Lawrence Radiation Labs in Berkeley. She'd been enthusiastic about it in her letters for six months, then had seemed to get bored. Mom had suspected it wasn't boredom but secretiveness, and she'd been right. Doris had met Bob Nichols, the egg head from Boston, judging from this letter.

During the next two weeks we got postcards from Niagara Falls, Starved Rock, Mammoth Caves . . . They were doing their honeymoon up right. Then came the telegram. They would arrive Satur-

day afternoon. I kept my mouth shut this time. It was an effort.

Doris had grown up. I kept looking at her, trying to get used to it. Her husband seemed like a kid—or rather, a mixture of kid and old maid. His movements were fussy. He fussed with his pipe, he adjusted the ash tray on the coffee table, he fidgeted when he sat on the davenport, then crossed his legs. He cleared his throat.

He had taffy colored hair. Ours is dark brown. He was big boned without being muscular. Donald and Billie take after me in being small boned but wiry, with quick, sure movements and biceps that can ball up like a fist, even under a shirt.

We looked at him and he looked at us, while Doris chatted happily about all the places they'd been on their honeymoon. When there were silences, Mom or Pat or Joanne would say something quick to get Doris going again about Niagara Falls or some other part of the trip.

It was up to me, so in one of the silences I said, "Doris tells us you're a scientist, Bob."

He puffed blue smoke from his pipe. "I guess you could call me that," he said. "I'm a research chemist."

"Oh," I said.

"What does a research chemist do, Bob?" Joanne asked.

"Well . . ." He uncrossed his legs. "It's a little like what your father does. Something happens—a murder, for instance. He and his men, working as a team, gather all the evidence. Then, using the evidence, they try to identify the unknown quantity. X. The murderer. But maybe the evidence isn't enough. Then they have to figure out what X will do under certain circumstances, and arrange those circumstances, to trap him. I do much the same thing, but with chemicals instead of murderers."

"Oh," Joanne said.

"Well," Mom said with forced cheerfulness, "the Swiss steak should be done now. Pat, Joanne, set the table. Doris, Bob, I know you want to wash up after your long drive. There's towels laid out for you in the bathroom." She smiled at Bob, gave me a helpless look, then fled to the kitchen.

"Donald," I said, "why don't you and Billie bring in their suitcases."

Bob Nichols opened his mouth like he was going to say something, but Donald and Billie had fled. With a sigh Bob followed Doris upstairs, and half an hour later we were all sitting around the table.

Bob sampled the Swiss steak,

smacked his lips, and said, "This is delicious, *Mother*." The word caught me completely by surprise, and I choked.

Mom—Janet—turned the brightest shade of pink I'd seen on her since the days I courted her, almost thirty years ago. "It's just Swiss steak," she said.

"It's far more than just Swiss steak," Bob plunged on. "I hope Doris has the recipe—"

"Tell me, Bob," Billie came to the rescue, "if being a research chemist is so much like being a detective, do you think you could solve a crime?"

"I've never had the opportunity to try," Bob said. "I'm sure your father is far more—"

"Give him a crime, pop," Billie said. "You've got lots of unsolved ones." He was suckering Bob into making a fool of himself.

"Oh for Pete's sake!" Donald said, disgusted at Billie.

A case popped into my head. It had happened a year ago. We'd "solved" it but never found out who the killer was. It had sort of bothered me at the time, and that's why I thought of it now. "Why not?" I said. "I'll give you the case of Byron Jacks."

"Byron Jacks," I said, "checked into the Roosevelt Hotel, was taken

to his room by a bell boy, and two minutes later he was dead. Shot through the head. The chambermaid was still in the room, so she was an eyewitness to the whole thing. The phone rang, Byron Jacks picked it up to answer it, the bullet came through the window, entered the back of his head, and did a rather ugly job coming out his left cheek. We were able to trace the flight of the bullet quite accurately, thanks to the maid's testimony. It came from a fire exit window of the Medical Building across the alley, a distance of twenty-three feet by actual measurement.

"As with most crimes, the obvious answer is the right one. The previous occupant of the room, a Chicago underworld character by the name of Joe Brady, was the intended victim. Byron Jacks had a reservation. Joe Brady had objected to moving out, right up to the last minute. We found him in the Congress Hotel three blocks from the Roosevelt where he had just checked in after trying three other hotels without success. He had been in the room at the Roosevelt for a week, which gave the killers plenty of time to make their plans. He was still sore—until he learned that being evicted from the Roosevelt had saved his life. He was more than willing to talk

then. He admitted being the scout for a Chicago syndicate interested in getting a foothold in Central City by muscling in on the slot machine concessions and other businesses. When we wouldn't give him permission to leave town; he asked for protective custody. We held him for forty-eight hours while we checked into his activities. When we released him he demanded a police escort to the airport." I chuckled and added, "Those Chicago mobsters aren't as brave as they're made out to be. And of course it was impossible to find out who had killed Byron Jacks. Any one of a dozen men we know of could have given the order, and the trigger man could have been anyone. No fingerprints, witnesses, or gun."

Bob Nichols frowned in thought. I watched him. He was shorter than my five feet ten but weighed more than Donald or Billie who were six feet tall. Doris, sitting beside him, had a secret smile tugging at the corners of her mouth. Bob said, "Hmm," now and then at some thought, opened his mouth as though about to say something, then clamped his lips together.

After ten minutes of this Bob grinned at me suddenly and said, "It's like deducing the nature of a particle from its path through a cloud chamber."

"A what through a what?" I grunted, but he had already retreated back into his thoughts and didn't answer.

The rest of us began eating again. Even Doris. Bob sat there staring into space, saying, "Hmm," now and then. It was awe-inspiring in a way, like watching a Univac would be, maybe. Like Donald said later, "I could almost smell the bakelite and banana oil." You know, like new equipment smells fresh from the factory.

I finished my Swiss steak and wiped my plate clean with a last slice of bread, soaking up the gravy. In our house the garbage man gets only the cans and bottles—on my salary . . .

Finally I couldn't stand it any more. "Don't you have any questions, Bob?" I asked.

"Huh?" He blinked his eyes like he was waking from a nap. "Questions? Two. Was Byron Jacks from Chicago? Do you know where Joe Brady lives now?"

"Byron Jacks lived in Winnetka, a suburb of Chicago," I said. "Joe Brady lives in a swanky penthouse apartment on Rush Street in Chicago."

Bob nodded. He looked down at his plate and looked surprised, as though just discovering it. Taking a bite of the now cold Swiss steak he chewed on it, frowned at his

water glass and moved it a quarter of an inch.

"Your dinner is cold," Mom said. "Let me warm it for you."

"No. That's all right," Bob said. "The true test of Swiss steak is, is it still delicious when cold? This is even better cold than hot!"

"I've never tried it cold," Mom said doubtfully.

"Have you given up, Bob?" Billy said, winking at me.

"Given up?" Bob said, taking another slice of bread and buttering it. "Oh. I see what you mean. Well, why shouldn't I finish my dinner—now that I know who killed Byron Jacks." He bit into his freshly buttered bread in the startled silence.

I looked at Doris. She was using every ounce of will power to keep from busting out laughing. She was three shades pinker from the effort, and it made her about five shades prettier. I was beginning to see why she had snagged Bob—but a sneaking suspicion was entering my mind that maybe he had snagged her instead! The way he had just pinned Billie's ears back with *Why shouldn't I finish my dinner now that I know who killed Byron Jacks!*

"The only trouble is proving it," Bob added, seemingly oblivious to the undercurrents in the room. He glanced across the table at me.

"Are you willing to let me try something?" he asked me. "It would be an experiment in arranging circumstances to trap the murderer."

"I don't know," I said cautiously. "What do you have in mind?"

Bob grinned. "I believe," he said, "that this is where the classic detective in fiction becomes secretive and mysterious."

"You don't want anyone arrested or picked up for questioning?" I asked.

"No. Lord no!" Bob said.

"In that case—why not?" I said. I glanced at Billie, who winked at me and nodded. Billie was thinking the same thing I was thinking—that it was unlikely that Bob actually knew who the killer was. Billie wanted Bob to stick his neck out and make a fool of himself. I had something else in mind. Something entirely different. So I gave Billie a deadpan wink and said to Bob, "Go ahead. I'll play along."

Bob nodded, frowned at Billie, then said to Doris, "Doris, call up the airport and find out when the next plane to Chicago leaves and when it arrives there." He took another bite of Swiss steak and chewed on it as though nothing but food was on his mind, while Doris called the airport.

"How many tickets should I

get?" was the only question Doris asked her new husband.

"None," Bob said, drooling a little gravy in the process and wiping it off with his napkin. I began to love that boy!

"Flight five oh nine," Doris called from the phone, "takes off here at seven twenty and arrives at the Municipal Airport in Chicago at nine seventeen. It's on time, too."

We all glanced at the clock. It was ten to six. Doris came back to the table and sat down. Bob looked toward me and said, "Can you get the Chicago police to see if Joe Brady meets that plane and follow him if he does?"

"I guess so," I said. "They've always cooperated with me before."

"Find out," Bob said. "I'll pay for the call. And let me talk to them before you hang up. Find out first if they'll cooperate."

"You don't need to pay for the call, Bob," I said half-heartedly. Then I thought of how he had set Billie back on his heels and added, "No, by golly! This is on me!"

I finally got Lt. Wilson on the phone. He was glad to do the favor. I turned him over to Bob.

"There won't be anyone on the plane for him to meet," Bob said on the phone, "but if Joe Brady shows up there he'll do one of three things. Go back home, in which case you might keep a watch

on him for a day or so, take a plane, in which case I hope you can find out his destination and report back to us, or go see somebody, which is what I think he will do. We want to know who he goes to see, and whoever it is you'd better interrupt him right after he goes in or you might have a murder on your hands." He listened for a minute, then said, "No matter how it turns out, call us here and reverse the charges," and hung up.

I winced and decided I wouldn't refuse if Bob offered to pay for the calls. He probably made more money than I did anyway, and only had Doris to support.

Then Bob looked up a number in the phone book and dialed it.

"Western Union?" he said. "I want to send a straight wire to Joe Brady." He gave the address and phone number I'd given him. "Mr. Brady," he said. "I'll break if I have to take any more of this. Meet me. Flight five oh nine, nine seventeen tonight, from Central City." Bob listened, then said, "No. He'll know who it is." More listening. "Okay, sign it *Desperate*." More listening. "Yes, you can call back." He hung up. A few seconds later the phone rang and I took it and okayed the telegram.

"Now," Bob said apologetically, "all we can do is wait."

We waited. Bob Nichols sat restlessly, fussing with his knife, moving his glass of water back the quarter of an inch to where it had been before. Joanne, who usually couldn't wait to get up from the table, showed no inclination to leave. Patricia yawned, then got up and went to the kitchen and came back with the coffee pot—something she had never done before. Mom winked at me and I winked back. Donald seemed immersed in thought, and since he never thought about anything except cars I knew he must be thinking about Bob's car and how it had sounded when it came up the driveway. You get to know your own kids, so I knew what Donald was going to say when he opened his mouth.

"You and Doris can use my car tomorrow, Bob," Donald said. "I'll drive yours to work in the morning and give it a tuneup."

Billie was dying to ask Bob who the murderer was and how he knew. So was I, though I had a pretty good idea. Bob wasn't as much of an egg head as I'd taken him to be. He had to know a lot more about the Byron Jacks killing than I'd told him. That meant that Doris (who should have been a boy and would have been on the police force if she had been) had kept up on doings in Central City and had filled Bob in on things

from the minute she fell in love with him.

I was dying to ask Bob how he figured, myself, but I was damned if I was going to break first. I waited for Billie to break.

Mom started to clear the table, all except the coffee cups.

"Joanne, help your mother," I said, like I always do.

She frowned with annoyance and pouted defiantly like she always did, then got up and helped clear the table.

The ticking of the clock on the fireplace mantel got awfully loud. It was like a pulse beating in the room. It does that sometimes. It's the way it sets, I think. It actually gets louder. Right now it was having an effect on Billie. I knew he was about to break, so I relaxed. Bob caught my eye and winked. It startled me. I suddenly realized he knew the tick of the clock had actually gotten louder and that it was affecting Billie. I suddenly realized Bob was waiting for Billie to break and ask him how he figured!

I also suddenly realized that Bob knew he was in with the family, all except Billie. All his "solving the crime" had been to play along with Billie and win him over.

"You're going to look awfully silly," Billie sneered, "when it turns out you're all wet . . ."

Bob grinned. "I've been wrong before," he said, picking up his spoon and examining it closely. "As a matter of fact, on the project I've been working on for the past two years, I've been wrong every time—but over thirty egg heads like me have been working on it, and one of us is bound to be right sooner or later. Then the U.S. has a nuclear ram jet engine that can take a manned missile into outer space." He frowned and seemed to bring his thoughts back to the present. "I don't think I'm wrong now, though."

"How do you figure?" Billie said, the sneer still in his voice. He was advertising that he was going to be hard to sell, which meant that underneath he was reluctantly being sold. Billie had rheumatic fever when he was little, so he's the spoiled member of the family. During the years when he should have been getting whacked on the hind end like the others, we had to coddle him.

The corners of Bob's lips quirked. "Nothing mysterious about it," he said. "Joe Brady killed Byron Jacks."

"Now wait a minute!" I said in spite of my determination to keep my mouth shut and let Billie stick his neck out.

"You think pop doesn't know his business?" Billie said triumphantly.

"Of course he knows his business," Bob said. "So does Joe Brady. He's a professional killer."

"Now we get to it," I said. "What do you know about him that I don't?" I was beginning to see the light. Bob, being in a Government project, had intimate contact with the F.B.I. and a lot of their secret files that local law enforcement agencies don't know about.

"Not a thing," Bob said, toying with his fork. "In fact, I don't know a thing more than you told me. Why did Joe Brady stay in that hotel? So he could set up the murder. Putting myself in his place, I would rent a room at the Roosevelt, put a blue light in one of the table lamps and place it where the phone is, then go over to the Medical Building and find out the place where I could see that blue light and the telephone. I'd study the whole thing out, including timing myself on getting from the hotel room to that window in the Medical Building.

"Byron Jacks obviously was attending a convention of some sort. The fact that he had a reservation and Joe Brady had to move to another hotel proves that. How Joe Brady maneuvered Byron Jacks into that particular hotel room is a little in doubt, but not much. I would say that Byron Jacks was the

last conventioneer to arrive at the hotel, and since Joe Brady stalled until the last minute before giving up his room, automatically Byron Jacks would be the one to get it. Joe Brady probably hung around the desk to make sure it was Byron Jacks who was waiting to get the room, before he consented to check out of the room. The fact that the chambermaid was changing the bed when Byron Jacks took the room indicates that Joe Brady had just left. The maid wouldn't come in until he checked out.

"So all Joe Brady had to do was stop in the lobby long enough to phone whoever had hired him, so that person could phone Byron Jacks and get him to answer the phone and set himself up as a target. Then Joe Brady hurried over to the Medical Building, shot Byron Jacks, and went hunting for another room. It took maybe five minutes. Or the person who called Byron Jacks could be anyone, and say anything. The only object of the call was to get Byron Jacks to the phone, where he could be shot.

"So the person who hired Joe Brady only had to make sure that Byron Jacks was the last conventioneer to reach the hotel, so that Joe Brady's objections to giving up his room would result in Byron Jacks' moving into that same room.

"It isn't anything that can be proved in court. A pro knows all those angles, or he wouldn't be a pro. The only point of attack is the person who hired Joe Brady. The telegram I sent to Joe Brady should point that person out. Why? Because it came from Central City, because a year has passed since the killing, and because Joe Brady will think the police have been working on the case, bringing this unknown person—this neutron that doesn't leave a visible track in the cloud chamber—into visibility."

"Then you didn't have anything more than what I said to go on?" I asked, unbelievably.

"Of course not!" Bob said, picking up his knife and examining it closely. "This sort of thing is out of my line, ordinarily. In fact, I might be sorry I got mixed up in it. But damn it!" He scowled.

"Now darling, don't get upset," Doris said to Bob.

"I'm not upset," Bob said petulantly. "I just don't like it." The little boy in Bob was visible. Suddenly I realized that Bob was high voltage, no matter how you looked at him. Even with the little boy showing in his make-up, I felt in awe of him.

It took time for the plane to reach Chicago. I visualized that

plane several times, boring through the stratosphere toward Chicago, with X, our neutron, on it. It was the sort of thing an egg head would conjure up to solve a crime—a neutron in a cloud chamber, whatever that was . . .

Meanwhile we moved to the living room and I found out Bob's taste in alcoholic beverages was Bourbon on the rocks. I prefer Chianti; of course, but I felt sort of humble tonight, and drank Bourbon on the rocks with Bob, and got slightly drunk. Even if he was all wet, I loved him like a son. I was glad Doris had moved to California and found Bob to marry. He was a fine addition to the family, and if Donald and Billie and Joanne and Patricia did half as well I could die happy when my time came! Maybe I had a little too much to drink.

In fact, I know I did, because once I was crying in my drink and Mom was patting me on the shoulder and saying, "Now John, now John, now John." But it's awfully hard, raising five kids and hoping they turn out right, and seeing all the kids that didn't turn out right down at the Station . . .

Anyway, the ringing of the phone sobered me up in a hurry. I looked around and everyone was expecting me to answer it, so I got up and started weaving toward the

dining room. Donald came to my rescue and helped me steer my course. He's a good boy, even if he is an automobile mechanic.

It was Lt. Wilson of the Chicago Police on the phone. He told me what had happened. I thanked him and hung up, and Donald helped me back to the living room. I sat down.

"Well, pop?" Billie said. Bob Nichols was fussing with his napkin, trying to get it to drape over his knee.

"Brady didn't show up," I said.

Billie snickered, then retreated behind his can of beer when I glared at him. Bob sighed deeply.

"Look, Bob," I said slowly, "who did you think was behind it?"

Bob shrugged, his lips curving down. "Byron Jacks' wife," he said. "That's why I signed the telegram, *Desperate*. A man wouldn't sign that way."

I nodded, then said, "Why did you put in the telegram—I'll break if I have to take any more of this?"

"To make Brady think the police had been questioning her," Bob said. "That would worry him because she might break down and tell the police she had paid him to kill her husband. That would force him to meet the plane—but it didn't."

"I see," I said. I went back to the phone and called Lt. Wilson in Chicago. "Look," I said when they located him, "find out if Joe Brady made any calls to Central City after six this evening, or sent any telegrams here. Also check on Byron Jacks' widow and see if she's okay."

"Will do," Lt. Wilson answered.

I got the dial tone and dialed the direct wire to my own office, getting Lt. McGrory. "Look, Ed," I said, "get out the Byron Jacks file. Something may be cooking. Check any shootings this evening against the names in that file. If you find a connection, let me know. I'll call you later. I'm expecting a call from Chicago that may give something more." I hung up and went back to the living room. They had all heard my end of the phone calls.

"What was that all about?" Billie asked.

I shrugged and busied myself freshening my Bourbon on the rocks. I just got comfortable when the phone rang. It was Lt. Wilson in Chicago. He gave me a phone number. I thanked him and hung up. Before I could lift the phone, it rang again. It was McGrory.

I listened to what he had to say, then said, "Okay, now check out this phone number and pick up everyone. Check out any guns with

ballistics. If that works we have a tight case."

I hung up and went back to the living room and sat down. I grinned at Bob and picked up my Bourbon on the rocks. Bob had a questioning scowl on his face, but he didn't say anything.

I swirled the ice cubes around in my glass and said, "You're okay, Bob. I'm beginning to get a picture of what you do. Your m.o. You take known substances and combine them to make a new substance. You're good at that. Right?"

"That's what I do as a research chemist," Bob said. "But what . . . ?"

"What does that have to do with this?" I said. "Let me ask you something. Do the new substances sometimes have powers you didn't expect?"

"Almost always," Bob said.

"That's what I mean," I said. "You sent a telegram to Joe Brady. You expected it to have a certain effect on him, based on a theory you had. Your theory was one hundred percent wrong, but your telegram was real and had an effect you couldn't predict. You see, not only was Joe Brady the intended victim of that bullet, he also knew who ordered the bullet, who fired it, and who fingered him. We thought he did at the time, but there was no way we could prove

it, or make him talk. All he wanted was OUT. The party that fingered him—put a blue light next to the phone or something—was a girl he got cozy with when he was there. When Byron Jacks got killed Joe Brady knew the girl had been the finger. He wanted no part of her. When he got your telegram, he thought she had sent it—not Mrs. Jacks, as you expected. He immediately called the man who had wanted him murdered. You see, Brady thought she was coming to Chicago to rat on her boss, or at least be a nuisance to him. The locals got to her before the plane took off. Of course she denied planning to run out, but who would believe her after the call from Brady? They took her for a ride. She was found a half hour ago in the ditch on U.S.41. The local boys don't know we have a fix on them, so we may catch them with the gun that did the job. We still

won't have solved the Byron Jacks case—technically—but we'll have them cold for the murder of Shadi Dell, a local strip teaser." I chuckled. "Imagine Shadi Dell's surprise when the local hoods showed up at her apartment about six forty-five and accused her of planning to catch a plane to Chicago. Of course she denied it, but who would believe her?" I chuckled again, and swirled the ice cubes in my drink. "The timing was perfect!" I concluded.

"You mean my telegram caused the death of . . . ?" Bob said. He was turning green around the gills.

"That's a by-product, you might say, of this experiment in arranging circumstances," I said.

Bob staggered to his feet and started toward the stairway, retching.

It was Billie who leaped up to help him. Billie's always been the sensitive member of the family.



(Continued from other side)



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